

Stefan Zweig  
ERASMUS  
— AND —  
THE RIGHT TO  
HERESY



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and

THE RIGHT  
TO HERESY

by Stefan Zweig

Translated by Eden and  
Cedar Paul

## BACK COVER

In *Erasmus* and *The Right to Heresy*, one of the great European writers of the twentieth century tackles the issues of tolerance and power, peace and violence, understanding and prejudice that lie at the roots of modern Europe's dilemmas.

This volume brings together two of Stefan Zweig's most compelling studies of the historic moments that have helped to create our world: the confrontation between the

great humanist scholar Erasmus and the angry reformer Martin Luther; and that between the gentle theologian Sebastian Castellio and the fanatical moralist Calvin.

First published in Austria in the 1930s, when those traditions of reason and tolerance which Zweig saw as essential to the Europe he knew faced extinction, *Erasmus and The Right to Heresy* are at once his protest against dictatorship and his celebration of the continuing conflict between enlightenment and tyranny. They became



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

STEFAN ZWEIG was born in Vienna in 1881. Educated at the Vienna Gymnasium and the University of Vienna, he obtained a Ph.D. in 1904. An immensely prolific writer, in his prime he was probably the most widely read German author since Goethe. His output included novels, plays, essays, poems, historical works and critical studies, all with an almost universal appeal, for he set himself to be a true European,

recognising no frontiers but those of spirit and intellect. The two world wars of this century caused a shattering of his ideals: during the 1914-18 struggle, unable to take sides himself, he sought refuge in Switzerland; in 1939 there was no such escape from reality. Broken-hearted, he fled to Brazil and there committed suicide, unable to hope that the Europe he had believed in would ever exist again.

‘Erasmus’ and ‘The Right to Heresy’ were both first published in Austria in 1938. The English





ERASMUS



THE RIGHT TO  
HERESY

STEFAN ZWEIG  
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Cedar Paul*





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# Chapter 1: THE MAN'S AIMS AND SIGNIFICANCE

ERASMUS of Rotterdam, the greatest and most brilliant star of his century, is to-day, we cannot deny the fact, hardly more than a name. His numerous works, written in an obsolete, supranational tongue (the Latin of the humanists), sleep undisturbed upon the shelves of libraries; hardly a single one of them, though in their day they enjoyed world-wide fame, has any message to our

epoch. His personality has been put into the shade by mightier and more imposing reformers, partly because Erasmus's character was difficult to understand, and also because it was full of ambiguities and contradictions. There is little of an entertaining nature to tell of his private affairs; for a man who leads a retired and extremely busy intellectual life scarcely lends himself to description, and is, therefore, a meagre subject for the biographer. But even his actual



of his life, and one which binds him to us in closer brotherly affection, was that he sustained defeat in the struggle for a juster and more harmonious shaping of our mental world.

Erasmus loved many things which we ourselves are fond of; he loved poetry and philosophy, books and works of art, languages and peoples; he loved the whole of mankind without distinction of race or colour, loved it for the sake of a higher civilization. One thing alone did he wholeheartedly detest, and that was fanaticism, which he

looked upon as contrary to reason. He himself was the least fanatical of mortals; it is open to question whether he was a man of first-class intelligence, but no one will deny that he was a man of wide knowledge; his kindliness of heart may not have been overwhelming, but he unquestionably had a straightforward disposition to be kindly; and these qualities combined to make every form of intellectual intolerance irksome to him and led him to consider it as the greatest evil encumbering our earth. He



mutual understanding. He detested bigotry in all its manifestations; he loathed the stiff-necked and the biased, whether these wore a priestly cassock or a professorial gown; he hated those who put on blinkers, and the zealots of every class and race who demanded immediate acquiescence in their own opinions while looking upon the ideas that failed to correspond with theirs as rank heresy or rascality. Just as he himself never wished to impose his outlooks upon his neighbour, so in turn did

he refuse to be burdened with the religious or political theories of others if these happened to be alien and unacceptable. He took it as a matter of course that a man had a right to his own opinions; absolute independence of mind was essential. Himself a free spirit, he looked upon it as a fettering of the delightful manifoldedness of the universe when, from pulpit or university chair, a man declared his truth to be the only truth, to be a special message which God had whispered into his ear and his ear alone. His life long













there existed neither a moral nor an unbridgeable antagonism between Jesus and Socrates, between Christian teaching and the wisdom of classical antiquity, between piety and ethics. He, an ordained priest, accepted the heathen into his intellectual paradise; and in the same spirit of tolerance he took his place side by side with the Fathers of the Church. Philosophy, so far as he was concerned, was just as pure a method of the search for God as was theology, and he did not







expression which, during a moment in the history of human development, bound them in an intellectual harmony transcending frontiers. This, indeed, was an unforgettable achievement. His wide vision led him to look gratefully back into the past; while his trustful turn of mind made him confidently anticipate the future. But where the barbarism of the world was concerned, the barbarism which rudely oversets God's plans, which continuously endeavours to destroy the divine ordering



by means of enlightenment; and Erasmus, together with others of his way of thinking, honestly believed that the individual and the community could attain to a higher level of culture through the spread of education in which writing, study, and books were to play the most decisive part. These early idealists had a touching and wellnigh religious trust in the capacity of human nature to become more noble by means of the unremitting cultivation of learning and of reading. Erasmus, being



personal existence has invariably seemed insignificant and unreal when divorced from the comforting thought, the soul-freeing delusion, that the individual, too, can contribute by his wishes and his deeds towards the perfectionment of the world at large. Each epoch is but a step in the direction of this desired perfectionment; is but a preparation for the better conduct of life. He who, on the strength of such a hope, fully believes in the possibility of man's moral progress through the birth













awakening enthusiasm for friendly co-operation, arouses a spirit of rivalry, instils an easily comprehended and obvious antagonism against an alien class, an alien race, an alien religious creed. The devouring flames of fanaticism are far more easily kindled by hate than by any other means. The young long to look a concrete enemy in the face, one whose hackles are rising like their own. Hence a supranational and panhuman ideal such as Erasmism lacks that









huge waves of the earlier wars merely touched the outside marge of folk-life and were confined within the borders of those nations or those provinces which happened to be engaged in them. Moreover, the intellectual part of the nation can usually hold aloof from social or religious disturbances, and with undivided mind contemplate the welter of passion on the political stage. Goethe was such a figure. Undisturbed amid the tumult of the Napoleonic campaigns, he



quietly continued his work. Sometimes, however, at rare intervals through the centuries, antagonisms reach such a pitch of tension that something is bound to snap. Then a veritable hurricane stampedes over the earth, rending humanity in sunder as though it were a flimsy cloth the hands could tear apart. The mighty cleft runs athwart every country, every town, every house, every family, every heart. From every side the individual is attacked by the overwhelming force of the

masses, and there is no means of protection, no means of salvation from the collective madness. A wave of such magnitude allows no one to stand up firmly against it. Such all-encompassing cleavages may be brought about by social, religious, or other problems of a spiritual and theoretical nature. But so far as bigotry is concerned, it matters little what fans the flames. The only essential is that the fire should blaze, that it should be able to discharge its accumulated store of hate; and precisely in such





essentially the far-visioned man of intellect, the evolutionary, had as antagonist in the arena of destiny, a man of action, a revolutionary, Luther, an emanation of the dark, daimonic forces of the Germanic peoples. Dr. Martin Luther's heavy peasant fist destroyed at one blow all that Erasmus's delicate penmanship had so onerously and tenderly put together. The Christian and European world was, consequently, hopelessly divided for centuries thereafter, so that Catholic was opposed to Protestant,

northerners to southerners, Germans to Latins. At that time only one choice, one decision was open to the people of Germany and to western civilization: to be either papist or Lutheran, to obey either the power of the keys or the words of Holy Writ. Erasmus, to his praise be it said, remained the only leader of his epoch who refused to take sides. He neither espoused the cause of the Church nor that of the Reformation, for he felt bound to both: to evangelical teaching, since he himself had so long demanded a careful study

of Scripture and had done all in his power to make the Gospels available to the people at large; and to the Catholic Church, since in her he saw the last remaining form of spiritual unity standing solid in a crumbling world. To right of him was exaggeration and to left was exaggeration, to right he saw fanaticism and to left; and he, the intractable anti-fanaticist, desired to serve neither one form of excess nor the other. His only master had always been fair-mindedness, and this master alone would he

obey. It was in vain that he endeavoured to save the universal heritage of culture and civilization from wanton destruction, remaining as mediator in the middle of the fray, thus taking up the most dangerous of positions. With his bare hands he tried to mix fire and water, to reconcile this fanatic with that opposing one—to no purpose, for such reconciliations are impossible of achievement. All the greater honour to Erasmus for the attempt. At the outset the two camps could make neither





by saying I'm a Guelph." Luther, the Protestant, fulminated curses against him; the Catholic Church placed his books upon the Index. Yet neither threats nor vituperation could deviate Erasmus from his path, and induce him to rally to one party or the other. *Nulli concedo*, to neither shall I belong, such was his motto until the end; *homo per se*, man as man, with utmost consistency. In Erasmus's estimation, the duty of the artist and the man of intelligence was to act as sympathetic mediator





his line. He stood aside prudently, and bent to right and to left like a reed in the storm; he acted thus because he had no wish to be broken, and so that in the interludes of calm he might rise again. Not for him to carry his independence, his *nulli concedo*, like a monstrance before him, but to hide it as a thief's dark-lantern beneath his cloak. He crept away into corners and on to devious paths during the wildest outbursts of popular madness; but—and this is what proves of greatest importance—he

kept his spiritual treasure, his belief in mankind, intact and brought it safely out of the terrible storm of hate which raged around him; and it was from this tiny flame that Spinoza, Lessing, and Voltaire, not to mention all the “good Europeans” who trod the same road, were able to kindle their lamps. No clansman could have been more faithful to his tribe than was Erasmus, alone in his generation, leal to the whole of mankind. Though he kept aloof from the battlefield, though he owed allegiance to no army,



him by with her nose in the air. Erasmus takes a back place on the immense canvas of the Reformation. His contemporary reformers play out their destinies to a dramatic end — John Huss was consumed in flames, Savonarola burned (though after hanging) in Florence, Servetus was thrust into the fire by Calvin the zealot. Each lived through his hour of tragedy: Thomas Munzer was tortured to death with red-hot pincers; John Knox died prematurely from the hardships to which he had





desolating flames of religious mania spread far and wide; the devastations of the Peasants' War are witnesses to the zealots' misinterpretation of Christ's teaching; the ruined towns, the plundered farmsteads of the Thirty Years War—the apocalyptic landscapes are clamorous of human unreason and of a refusal to yield. In the midst of this orgy, however, slightly in the rear of the mighty captains of the ecclesiastical warfare, and holding conspicuously aloof from them, the



well he knew the everlasting “stultitia” of his fellow men! But around his mouth plays a gentle smile of certitude, for he, experienced as he was, knew only too well that passion lives for a day in the aeons of time and then grows tired and is extinguished. Fanaticism is fated to overreach its own powers. Reason is eternal and patient, and can afford to bide her time. Often, while the drunken orgy is at its highest, she needs must lie still and mute. But her day dawns, and ever and again she comes into



## Chapter 2: A GLIMPSE AT THE EPOCH

THE transition from the fifteenth century to the sixteenth was a fateful period in the destinies of Europe, and in its dramatic succession of events is only comparable with the times in which we live. All in a moment Europe enlarged her frontiers so as to encompass the whole earth, discovery followed upon discovery, and within a few years the adventurous spirits of a new generation of mariners



crossed the Indian Ocean to Calicut, opening up the sea-route to Hindustan; in 1500, Cabral discovered Brazil; in 1519 Magellan set forth upon the most noteworthy voyage, a voyage which was crowned with success—the first voyage man had ever made round the world, the voyage from Spain and home to Spain once more, though Magellan was killed on the journey. Martin Behaim made his “earth-apple”, which when it first appeared was looked upon as an unchristianly hypothesis and laughed at



as the work of a fool; but in 1492 this globe was recognized as a correct representation of the earth, so that adventurous deeds had given birth to the boldest thoughts. Between night and morning the round ball of our planet upon which man had so long dwelt but which hitherto had been a *terra incognita* to him, circling unknown through the stellar universe, had become a reality which any intelligent fellow might explore; the oceans, until then accepted as a wide expanse of blue water



they gazed upon the amazing freights of silver and of gold; and into every corner of Europe news was carried informing the peoples that, thanks to the heroism and intelligence of these same peoples, Europe had become the focus and ruler of the whole earth; almost at the same time Copernicus was exploring the stellar universe; and all these fresh items of knowledge spread rapidly (owing to the recently acquired art of book-printing) into the towns and even into the remotest hamlets. Thus, for

the first time in many centuries, Europe achieved a collective life that brought happiness and well-being to her peoples. Within the compass of one generation, the fundamental elements of human philosophy, the whole concept of space and time, took on another aspect and another value. The only other epoch comparable with this turn of the century is our own, with its sudden diminution of space and time by means of the telephone, wireless, automobile, and aircraft, through its abrupt change

in the rhythm of life by discoveries and inventions. Such a sudden enlargement of the physical universe must inevitably exercise a mighty upheaval in the realm of the spirit as well. Each individual, whether he wills it or not, is obliged to think, to calculate, and to live in terms of a new dimension; but before the brain has had time to accommodate itself to these wellnigh inconceivable changes, the emotions have already suffered a metamorphosis, so that the initial reaction of the spirit is a restless





henceforward  
unencumbered. A spiritual  
fever for knowledge and  
science arose because of  
this colossal transfusion of  
fresh blood into the  
European organism, and  
the rhythm quickened.  
Developments, which had  
been going ahead at a  
measured speed, were now  
goaded on, by this fever, to  
assume the characteristics  
of a stampede; everything  
that had hitherto been  
stationary was set in  
motion as if the earth had  
quaked. The ordering of  
human life, which had been  
carried on unaltered







by the events of this turn in the centuries and in the expansion of the civilized world. The Catholic Church had become petrified in its own dogma and like a solid rock had withstood every assault. Obedience, magnificent in the way it imposed itself upon Mother Church's children, had been the seal and legacy of the Middle Ages. The Authority of the Church stood aloft, brazen and puissant; from below the faithful gazed upward for a sign, breathlessly awaiting the holy word; no doubt was permitted to



community. The people of the Middle Ages possessed but one soul, the Catholic soul. Europe rested in the lap of her mother, the Church; sometimes she was lulled by mystical dreams, sometimes she roused herself, but invariably she returned to repose on the maternal breast, and any desire to see truth by way of knowledge and science was contrary to the spirit of the age. But then, for the first time, a feeling of restlessness entered the heart of the European community. People began

to ask themselves why, since the secrets of the earth were being disclosed one by one, the divine mysteries, too, might not be elucidated. Sporadically the faithful rose from the knees of her to whom they had lifted meek eyes in reverence; a new courage of thought and questioning entered their being, and side by side with the explorers of unknown seas and continents, side by side with Columbus, Pizarro, Magellan, arose the generation of spiritual conquistadors who resolutely went forth to

discover the infinite. The religious mind, which for centuries had been encased in dogma as wine is held inert in a sealed bottle, streamed forth like ether and penetrated the depths of the people as well as ecclesiastical councils. Even the masses wanted to requicken and change the world. Thanks to this all-conquering self-confidence, the people of sixteenth-century Europe no longer felt like tiny specks of dust thirsting after the dew of divine grace, but as the centre of variegated happenings, as strong







philosophers, for scientists, and for all who wish to study the workings of the human mind and to lay bare its secrets. The spirit is finding new fields in which to deploy its forces. Humanism endeavours to bring man once more in touch with the divine, without priestly intervention; and gradually there emerges, tentatively at first, and then borne forward by the self-assertion of the masses, the world-shaking movement of the Reformation.

The turn of a century became an epochal event;





## Chapter 3: YOUTH IN OBSCURITY

A REMARKABLE symbol for a man who was to become supranational, a genius belonging to the whole world, was that Erasmus had no mother country, no home. In a certain sense, he was born in void space. The name Erasmus Roterodamus was not bestowed on him by his father or his ancestors. It was an assumed name coined from the language of his adoption, not from the Dutch which was

spoken habitually around him, but from the Latin he acquired in later days. The date of his birth is uncertain; though there is good reason to suppose that he was born round about 1466. Erasmus himself is to blame for the obscurity in which his early days are wrapped; he disliked talking about his beginnings, for he was not only an illegitimate child but the son of a priest. *Ex illicito et ut timet incesto damnotoque coitu genitus*, and what Charles Reade, in his celebrated work *The Cloister and the Hearth*,

narrates concerning the childhood of Margaret Brandt's boy is the sheerest romance. Erasmus's parents died early; and, very naturally, the relatives wished the bastard to be reared as cheaply as possible. Luckily the Church is never loath to take charge of a youngster who seems of good promise. At nine years of age, little Desiderius (more truthfully, the Undesired!) was sent to school at Deventer and later to Hertogenbosch. In 1487 he entered the Augustinian monastery at Steyn, not so























eagerness; and busied himself besides with writing his *Antibarbari*. Such was the name of his first book, and it might appropriately have stood on the title-page of all his subsequent works. Without realizing the fact, he had begun the great campaign which was to engage his energies until his death, the fight against ignorance, folly, and traditional presumption. During this lengthy struggle, his own moral code gained precision, and his learning became more extended. After some hesitation, the







temperament. This celebrated institution was situated in the Latin Quarter, on the Mont Saint Michel, approximately on the site where the Pantheon stands today. It was a veritable prison-house of the mind, constraining young and eager students in their wish to acquire learning and secluding them from their comrades in the mundane life without its walls. Erasmus writes of this period as a sentence of imprisonment, a period passed in a theological gaol, a waste of the best



derisively: “Do you come from Montagu? Then undoubtedly you were crowned with laurels?”—“No, with fleas!” Nor was corporal punishment lacking, and what Loyola the fanatical ascetic had gratefully endured during twenty years for the good of his soul, proved highly obnoxious to a sensitive and independent man like Erasmus. Even the tuition offended his taste, for he had already detected the smell of decay in the formalism of the schoolmen, with its Talmudic flavour and

hairsplitting. The artist in him was disgusted, not perhaps so profoundly as was at a later date Rabelais, but Erasmus despised scholastic methods with equal intensity, hating their everlasting endeavour to fit the mind to the bed of Procrustes. "None can disentangle the mysteries of this science, none at least who has once frequented the Muses and the Graces. All that you have learned about *bona littera*, you must forget, and that which you have drunk at the fountains of Helicon you needs must



vomit forth again. I try not to say a single word of Latin, a single word that pleases or that may pass as witty, and I am making such progress in this endeavour that maybe on a day to come they will recognize me as one of themselves.” At last illness came to his aid. This furnished Erasmus with a pretext for escaping from the galleys of Montagu, which kept mind and body in chains. Abandoning the idea of working for his degree of Doctor of Theology, he went away to recuperate. After a while he







frighten the timid by virulent pamphlets, wheedle money out of the wealthy with begging letters. Forever faced by insecurity, through one benefactor or through many, he had to wage incessant and undignified warfare to secure his daily bread. Ten, and maybe twenty, generations of artists lived from hand to mouth in this way, from Walter von der Vogelweide down to Beethoven—who was the first of the great creators to demand his rights as artist and the first to exercise these rights





resolute and magnificent independence of mind. If he paid flattering compliments in his letters, it was that he might more openly unveil the truth in his books. Though he accepted gifts from anyone willing to bestow them, he never put himself up for auction; everything that might make a claim upon him and bind him to a master, he thrust aside. Having earned international fame as a man of learning, there were dozens of universities which would fain have offered him a professorial







while, than himself to be a bishop for all eternity; better act as counsellor to a prince at so many ducats a year, than himself to be the high and mighty treasurer who paid out the allotted salary. A deep-lying instinct drove this man of wide attainments to fight shy of any form of career or position of power. What he needed was to work in the shadows while another wielded power, he himself holding aloof from responsibility, reading noteworthy books within the four walls of a quiet room, writing works of his













elegant Latin, that he was an amusing conversationalist. He mixed with the best of the land and was fully appreciated for what he was worth. Glad at heart, he made acquaintance with the amazing hospitality and the noble-minded spirit of fair play of *ces grands Mylords*, the English, with their *accords, beaux et courtois, magnanimes et forts*, as Ronsard expresses it. While in this unknown land, Erasmus discovered that there were other ways of thinking than those to

which he had grown accustomed. Although John Wyclif had long since been gathered to his fathers, the freer theological discussions he had introduced still blew as a fresh current of sweet air through the colleges at Oxford; here he found scholars conversant with Greek, a language he had never studied; the finest brains were at his disposal, the greatest men were counted among his patrons and friends. Even the Prince of Wales, later to become king under the title of Henry the Eighth, asked









lines, includes both the Latins and the Greeks; so that though there be some few things I should like to visit in Italy I have no active longing to go there for the present. When I hearken to my friend Colet, it seems to me that I am listening to Plato himself; and has nature ever produced a kinder, gentler, happier creature than Thomas More?" England, in fact, cured Erasmus of the Middle Ages.

Still, in spite of his affection for England, he never became an Englishman. He returned









he invariably selected the cleanest inns, where mine host received him the most courteously, and served him the best wines. He knew practically nothing save book-lore, possessing neither an eye for paintings nor an ear for music. The works of Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo, passed unnoticed before his gaze, and he looked upon papal enthusiasm for the arts as unnecessary extravagance and as mere love of display totally alien to the spirit of the Gospels. He read neither the strophes of Ariosto, nor

Chaucer's great works, nor any of the French poets. Latin, alone, was as music in his ears; Gutenberg's printing was the only art he recognized, the only one of the Muses he felt bound to by the ties of kinship, he, the subtlest type of the man of letters, to whom the content of the world was made intelligible through *littera*, through literature alone. He could get into touch with reality by no other means than through the medium of books, and he certainly had more intercourse with them than he ever had with women.



merely for their contents, but also for their material selves, he being the first thoroughgoing bibliophile. He worshipped their form, he liked handling them, he admired their artistic presentation. His moments of sheerest happiness were those passed at Aldus's printing-house in Venice, or with Frobenius in Basle, standing among the workers in the low-ceilinged room, receiving the galleys still damp from the press, setting up with the masters the delicate and beautiful initial letters, running to earth like an







wholly new planetary universe of the intellect. Erasmus's truths are possibly no more than clarifications. Still, if he lacked depth he compensated this by the width of his vision; if he was not a profound thinker he was certainly a correct thinker, a clear thinker, and a free thinker in Voltaire's and Lessing's sense, the prototype of those who understand and make others understand, an "enlightener" in the noblest interpretation of the word. He deemed it his natural vocation in life to

bring clarity and frankness into the realm of thought. Everything that was muddled antagonized him; he disliked the mystical and the metaphysical; like Goethe, he hated all that was nebulous. Wide horizons lured him, but he was not attracted towards the deep. He never bent over to contemplate the abyss as did Pascal at a later date; not for him the spiritual earthquakes of a Luther, a Loyola, or a Dostoevsky, those terrifying crises bordering on madness and presaging death. Exaggeration and



comprehensible to others that which was universally understandable. His first glance at a problem brought clarity; and whatever his eyes beheld, immediately became lucid and orderly. Thanks to this lucidity of his thought-process and his emotional penetration, he became the greatest elucidator, critic, educator, and teacher of his day—not a teacher of his generation alone, but of subsequent generations likewise, for the men of the Enlightenment, the Free-thinkers, the Encyclopaedists of the

eighteenth century and many a pedagogue of the nineteenth, were sibs to his mind.

Unfortunately, in everything that is sensible and instructive there lies embedded the danger of a lapse into the humdrum, and we must not indict Erasmus because the Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries declined into an exaggerated rationalism since it merely aped his methods while wandering far away from the spirit of his teaching. These wretched pygmies lacked

the pinch of Attic salt, that sovereign and refined wit, that pre-eminent independence of thought, which makes his own letters and dialogues so entertaining and so full of literary savour. In Erasmus's writings we find a cheerful humour making the scales even with a more ponderous erudition. He was strong enough to play with his own intellectual potency. Above all he combined a sparkling and yet by no means malicious wit, a caustic yet by no means icy humour which Swift was to inherit, and



For uttering the tenth part of what Erasmus ventured to say and write, others would have been sent to the stake merely because they expressed roughly what he conveyed with the most delicate of rapier thrusts. His books were acceptable to popes and princes of the Church, to kings and dukes alike; they brought, indeed, to their author munificent gifts and the highest honours. Erasmus packed his wares so cunningly that he was able, unbeknownst, to smuggle all the contraband of the Reformation into











could see your small and dapper figure moving about before me in the pleasantest manner." The lighter his vein, the more convincing did he become; and the more he wrote, the greater was his influence.

The first of his books to bring him fame was *Adagia*, and it was by chance that this collection of adages was brought together. It coincided with the taste of the learned world of the epoch, and was full of apt and recondite sayings, enlivened at times with telling comment and















## Chapter 4: LIKENESS

LAVATER, whose gifts as a physiognomist none will deny, wrote of Erasmus: "He has one of the most expressive countenances, one of the most decisive faces, I have ever seen." The great portrait painters of the day reacted to this "decisive" physiognomy, this "expressive" face, by drawing it over and over again. They valued it as a new type. Hans Holbein has left six portraits of the *preceptor mundi* at various ages; Albrecht Diirer, two;



and they presented him on their canvases with all the insignia of this intellectual puissance. Just as the warrior is presented to us in helmet and armour, the noble with his escutcheon and motto, the bishop with his ring and crozier, so is Erasmus presented to us with the weapon he himself discovered: he is the man with the book. He is portrayed amidst an army of books, writing books, creating books. Durer shows him with an inkhorn in his left hand and a pen in his right, folios and letters around him.



intellectual bearing. Invariably we are shown the thinker, the seeker, the self-prober, and it is this which imparts so great a vividness to an otherwise over-abstract countenance. Were it not for the inner power reflected from his eyes, Erasmus's face, so far as physical contour is concerned, cannot be called a beautiful one. Nature was not lavish with her bodily gifts when she fashioned this man whom she so richly endowed with intellectual capacity; she was thrifty, too, in the matter of vitality and







to picture the man as ever having been young, as riding on horseback, as swimming and fencing, as joking with or even caressing a woman, as struggling against wind and storm, as conversing or laughing. The fine face, a monk's face, dried and pickled, calls up the picture of closed windows, overheated rooms, dust from books, wakeful nights, and arduous days. No warmth or stream of energy radiates from this cool countenance; and, as a matter of fact, Erasmus was always cold, huddling

himself in wide-sleeved, thick, fur-lined robes, cossetting himself against the slightest draught by wearing a velvet skull-cap upon his prematurely bald head. His face is the face of a man who never lived in real life, but who lived in thought, whose strength did not reside in his body, but inside the bone-case of the skull. Helpless when confronted with reality, Erasmus's true vital energies found expression in the achievements of his brain.

Erasmus's face has meaning for us only

through the aura of intellect which surrounds it. That one of Holbein's portraits which depicts the thinker in his unique moment of creative activity is an incomparable, an unforgettable work of genius; from all the great painter's masterpieces, it stands apart: it is, perhaps, the most satisfying presentation in colours of a writer who is about to translate through the magic of his pen the abstract idea into the concrete visibility of the written word. Once we have seen this notable





a tiny fold between the eyebrows betrays the strain he is undergoing as he sets down his thoughts in well-turned phrases. The immaterial, almost imperceptible frown so near the creative centre of the brain shows how the man is struggling to find the aptest turn of phrase in which to couch the freshly invented adage. Thought, thereby, seems to become a corporeal phenomenon, and one realizes that everything in the man is tense and vibrant, flooded with a mysterious stream of silence. It is amazing the



way in which Holbein succeeds in conveying the chemical transformation of energy which gives material shape to a purely spiritual material. For hours on end one can gaze at this picture, and lend an ear to listen to its all-pervading quietude—for by thus symbolically presenting Erasmus at work, Holbein has immortalized the divine earnestness of every intellectual creator and the invisible patience which is the asset of a genuine artist.

Holbein's portrait gives us Erasmus's quintessential being; through it alone can we come to realize the hidden power lying within the emaciated little body which, like the snail's shell—a burdensome and friable integument—accompanied the thinker throughout his earthly pilgrimage. During the seventy years of his life he was perpetually afflicted by bad health; for what nature had deprived him of in the way of muscle, she had supplied to excess in the matter of nerves. Even as a

young man he was neurasthenic; maybe he was hypochondriacal, for his organs were supersensitive. The protective covering of health was too thin to secure him from assault, so that if he was not plagued with one petty ailment he was afflicted with another—slight, maybe, but undermining. His digestion gave him unceasing trouble; his limbs were often racked with rheumatic pains or with gout; he “suffered from the stone”; every breath of keen air acted upon his



was obliged, in order to conserve a modicum of health, to allow himself certain indulgences. He needed to be particular as to what he drank, and the wines of Burgundy were the only ones capable of whipping up his chilly blood into a semblance of warmth. He was obliged to eschew beer, and the vintages of Baden and the Rhine, these latter being too sour for his delicate digestion. An Epicurean by nature, Erasmus fought shy of badly prepared food, his stomach refusing to assimilate indifferent meat,



day, to make a detour in order to avoid a peculiarly evil-smelling street, for every form of stench, of noise, of garbage, of reek, of rudeness and of tumult afflicted his mind as well as his body and wrought his soul up to the pitch of murderous frenzy. Once, in Rome, some friends took him to witness a bull-fight. He was utterly nauseated by the spectacle, declaring: "I have no liking for such bloody sports, they are relics of barbarism." His tenderness of heart made him revolt at any lapse from civilization. In an

epoch of gross physical negligence, he was a solitary hygienist and sought to bring into being such cleanliness as he brought into his style as artist and author. His more modern outlook, his more highly-strung temperament, made him far outstrip his rougher, thicker-skinned, iron-nerved contemporaries in matters of hygiene and sanitation, thus anticipating the improvements of a later day. His greatest dread was that he should be attacked by the plague which was



raging throughout every land at that time, and causing terrible havoc. If he learned that the disease was epidemic in a region one hundred miles away, he shuddered with apprehension and decamped panic-stricken no matter whether the emperor had summoned him to a council or the most attractive proposal had been made to him. He felt personally humiliated if he found vermin upon him, or pimples, or a boil. This excessive concern regarding illness never left him all his life. Frank, as











became serious he slipped away out of the danger zone. He could never utter a plain "Yes" or "No," but would use the evasive terms "If" or "Insofar," thus baffling his friends and enraging his enemies. Any who should place faith in him as an ally would be pitifully let down. For Erasmus, being one of the great solitaires, could remain faithful to no one but himself. Instinctively he avoided making any decision because by doing so he would feel bound. Dante, the ardent partisan, would probably have









He was an inveterate worker; his brain, ceaselessly active, and as indefatigable and tough as his body was weakly, knew not a moment's fatigue, uncertainty, or assault from the earliest years to his dying hour. It invariably worked with a limpid and inspiring energy. Though his flesh and blood were hypochondriacal, his brain was that of a giant on the warpath. Three to four hours' sleep sufficed for recuperation; the remaining twenty hours were passed in ceaseless



politics escaped his notice. Through the medium of books and letters, he learned of all that was happening outside the walls of his study. The fact that this vast accumulation of knowledge was acquired indirectly by means of the written and printed word imparts a flavour of the academical to Erasmus's erudition, and gives a hint of abstract coldness to his writings. Just as his body lacked juice and full-blooded sensuality, so do his works. He saw with his mind's eye, not with his living and absorbing organ

of sight; but his curiosity and his desire for knowledge embraced every sphere. Like a searchlight, his vision penetrated each problem of life, illuminating it with an equable and compassionate sharpness; his mind was a thoroughly modern thinking-machine of indescribable precision and amazing grasp. There was hardly a sphere of contemporary thought that his searching glance failed to irradiate: restless, exciting, and yet for ever clear, Erasmus's mind acted as the precursor and

pioneer of what the minds of a later epoch were to convert into public knowledge. Erasmus possessed, as it were, a divining-rod, with which he discovered the underground springs that his fellows passed by unheeding. With an instinctive flair, he mined for the veins of gold and silver; but, when he had found the lode, his interest in the problem waned, and he left the wearisome task of boring, of cradling, and of valuing to those who should come after. This was his limitation—or











upon and found more concentrated expression in his followers than in himself. The German Reformation, the Enlightenment, the unrestricted study of the Bible as contrasted with the satirical spleen of a Rabelais or a Swift; the European ideal and modern humanism—these are thoughts emanating from Erasmus's brain, but are not due to any act on his part. Though he gave the initial impetus, and set the problem a-going, his own movement overtook and outstripped him. Men

of understanding and penetration rarely accomplish anything in the world of concrete fact, for clarity and breadth of insight paralyse the physical impact. As Luther declares: "Seldom are good works undertaken with wisdom and prudence; everything occurs unconsciously. ..."

Erasmus was a shining light of his century, others had to furnish strength. He illuminated the way, others had to pass along it. Like all the springs of light, he himself remained in the shadow. Nevertheless, he



## Chapter 5: THE MASTER CRAFTSMAN

LUCKY the artist who discovers the true medium whereby to express in the most harmonious manner the results of his endowments. Thanks to the chance writing of *In Praise of Folly*, Erasmus found the medium best suited to his talents. The well-informed man of culture, the satirical mocker, and the keen critic who went to the making of Erasmus, here rubbed shoulders in the friendliest spirit of



















accompanied him for the remainder of this fortunate journey. Hardly had he settled down in Thomas More's cheerful mansion, when he began to write his witty little squib, mainly to entertain the circle of his friends. He christened his satire, on More's suggestion, *Moria encomium* (otherwise *Laus stultitia*, which is perhaps most happily translated, "In Praise of Folly").

Compared with his serious, influential, rather ponderous and highly scientific works, this small book, so full of impudence



and ridicule, would seem to have been the outcome of youthful exuberance, a creature light of foot and willowy in figure. But a work of art does not need scope and weight to give it spiritual consistency; and just as in politics one word, one joke, may often have greater effect than the most eloquent speech of a Demosthenes, so in the realm of literature, it is not bulk that counts but content. Among the hundred and eighty tomes bequeathed to us by Voltaire, *Candide*, that terse and mocking







means of irony and symbolism—and this was the only way in which it would have been possible to convey the truth at a time when intellectual darkness prevailed. Seldom, however, has the sacred light of the Fool been more deftly utilized than by Erasmus. In this witty satire, his tongue could speak freely, so that *In Praise of Folly* was the most daring and at the same time most artistic work of Erasmus's generation. Earnestness and merriment, profound knowledge and the most

impish nonsense, truth and exaggeration, make up the brightly-hued mosaic; if the reader should think to catch one mood and examine it, he will find it has slipped from his grasp with a quirk and a prank. If one recalls the style in which most authors of that day expressed themselves, if one remembers the coarse invective with which controversy was carried on, one can well understand why such a brilliant firework, thrown into the midst of the intellectual gloom that reigned, could delight and emancipate the

mind for a hundred years after it was concocted.

The satire begins with a jest. Dame Stultitia, in her academic gown but wearing the fool's cap on her head (it is thus that Holbein depicted her), mounts the rostrum and holds forth in praise of herself. She alone, we learn, with her hand-maidens Flattery and Self-Love keeps the world a-going. Without my aid, no league, no community life, can be a lasting acquirement; were it not for me the folk would not remain loyal to its ruling

















Erasmus—for who would venture to declare that he was singled out for condemnation when no one else was treated with less contempt than himself? For the first time, Erasmus was able to show the universality of his culture, his intellectual force, his wit, his knowledge, his clear-sightedness, and his humour. His scepticism and the soaring superiority of his vision of the world burst into a hundred sparks and hues like a splendid rocket. A lofty brain finds fulfilment

under sportive guise.

At bottom, however, this book was more than a joke to Erasmus, and he was able in the apparently small work to manifest his spirit more aptly than in any other because the *Laus stultitia* was a kind of examination of conscience applied to Erasmus himself. He deceived himself neither as to persons nor things, knowing what underlay the seemingly most inexplicable of weaknesses, realizing to the full what it was that hindered him in his undertakings and













population, and on some of these he was depicted as a huge blood-sucking spider. Erasmus publicly nailed the catalogue of curial crimes upon the wall of his epoch. Master of ambiguity as he was, he made use of his gift in magisterial manner, allowing his Stultitia to utter the dangerous and yet necessary strictures, and thus letting loose a determined assault upon the religious abuses of the day. Although such criticism was presented in farcical fashion, he who wields a verbal flail knows

well enough what lies behind the words. “If the highest dignitaries, if the popes, those representatives of Christ on earth, were really to model their lives upon His, were to copy His poverty, were to bear His burdens, were to carry His cross, were to share His scorn for mundane things, who could be more worthy of compassion than they? How many treasures would the Holy Fathers have to forfeit if wisdom were suddenly to subdue their minds! Instead of untold riches, divine honours, the

distribution of so many dignities and offices and dispensations, the pocketing of so many taxes and contributions, these people who had led such easy and enjoyable existences would have to spend their sleepless nights in prayer, would have to observe the fasts, would be expected to weep and to meditate and to pass their days in a thousand hardships.” Then, suddenly, Dame Stultitia shakes off her fool’s trappings, and unambiguously demands an early reformation.

















which made the Christian; but his spiritual trustworthiness, his human and Christianly way of living. “He alone does honour to the saints who imitates their virtues.” It is not by collecting their dry bones, not by going on pilgrimages to their tombs and burning many candles to their memory that a man proves his Christianity. Far more important than minute attention to ritual and prayer, to fasts and attendance at Mass, is that a Christian should order his life in the spirit of Jesus. “The quintessence of











human. In this matter, as in the other fields of knowledge he approached, Erasmus may be said to have opened up vistas rather than to have plumbed depths. His *Enchiridion militis christiani* (a Handbook for the Christian Fighter), a work written at the request of a pious lady for the edification of her husband, became the theological text-book of the common people; and the Reformation, with its challenging and revolutionary demands, found in the book a field



a “rinascimento” of Christianity, so that the world might forever be freed from strife and counterstrife, and thereby that a belief in God might truly be made the religion of mankind.

The fact that Erasmus was able to express the same thought in many different forms shows how versatile he was. *In Praise of Folly* reveals abuses within the Catholic Church; this *Handbook for the Christian Fighter* presents us with the dream of a universally understandable ideal, a religion that would



















friendly affection; one who, in spite of grievous defects, believed in this world and wished to lead it into the realm of clarity. What invariably happens in such circumstances happened in Erasmus's case. When a man is determined to deal with the most ticklish problems of his day, there assemble around him those who share his views, and this body of faithful admirers increases the master's creative energies by the power of their serene expectation. All the forces, all the hopes, all the impatience of the period



were concentrated in this man who was expected to raise mankind to a higher ethical standard by means of the newly discovered sciences. "He or none," was on every lip. "He or none can snap the intolerable tension which we all of us feel in the air." Merely as a literary man, Erasmus's name became an incomparable power at the opening of the sixteenth century. He might, had he possessed a daring spirit, have utilized his position to perform some outstanding deed, some authoritative reforming act, that would



## Chapter 6: GREATNESS AND LIMITATIONS OF HUMANISM

BETWEEN the ages of forty to fifty, Erasmus attained to the zenith of his fame. For a hundred years or more, Europe had known none greater. At the time when he flourished, not one of his contemporaries, neither Durer nor Raphael, Leonardo, Paracelsus, nor Michelangelo, enjoyed anything like the veneration which Erasmus received in the realm of the

spirit; no other author of the day saw his works issued in such numerous editions; no moral or artistic respect granted elsewhere could be compared with that which accrued around him. To pronounce the name of Erasmus was, in the early decades of the sixteenth century, to call up the perfect image of the wise man, the *optimum et maximum*, the best that brain could conceive of and the most sublime—as Melanchthon writes in his Latin panegyric — the unsurpassed authority in











of placing him on the staff; three popes wrote him letters full of veneration. His room was cluttered with tokens of esteem, free tributes from wealthy admirers. There were golden goblets and silver table-services; casks of finest wines were sent to him; rare and precious books. Everything seemed to have set itself in motion to tempt him to make the most of his celebrity. Erasmus, shrewd and sceptical as he was, accepted these gifts and honours with courtesy. He allowed others to bestow





Basle if chance took them near that town on their journeyings, for to have held converse with Erasmus came to be looked upon as a kind of cultural dubbing with knighthood, and a call at his house (as in the eighteenth century at Voltaire's and in the nineteenth at Goethe's) became one of the most obvious tokens of respect that could be paid to the symbolical carrier of the unseen power of the spirit. In order to possess a holograph signature of his name, nobles and men of learning would journey for



Voltaire nor Goethe) enjoy so great a prestige in Europe, a prestige due entirely to his intellectual acquirements.

Looking back through the centuries, it is hard to understand why Erasmus should have held such sway over his time and generation, for neither his works nor his activities seem to warrant anything of the sort. He appears to us a sensible, humane, versatile, and multiform personality, an attractive and stimulating man; but in no wise one to sweep his fellows along in a mighty











thought had taken the reins of government, and that works of art were destined to outlive the works of war and of politics. Europe realized at last that her vocation and the whole meaning of her existence lay in the dominance of the mind and in the creation of a united civilization which should rally beneath its standard all the peoples of the West. Thus she would start a movement which would lead to the inauguration of a world-wide culture.

The spirit of the age, therefore, chose Erasmus





instinct of the age acted rightly. The renewal which was fated to take place needed moderate reformers not rabid revolutionaries; in Erasmus, his contemporaries found the symbol to represent the incessant control exercised by reason. For a wonderful moment in time, Europe lay dreaming the humanist dream of a united civilization—united in speech, united in religion, united in culture—with the age-long and disastrous contentions laid to rest. This unforgettable







Erasmus's way of thinking hoped to lead mankind to adopt the humanistic and humane ideals they adumbrated. No; it was by lighting up the darkness that the roving beasts were to be lured into the bright realm, by gently convincing the ignorant and those who stood aside so that in the end they should of their own accord enter the circle of illumination. There is nothing imperialistic in humanism; in its domain there are neither foes nor thralls. He who refuses to belong to the select circle can remain outside if he

prefers; no one compels him; he is not pressed forcibly to accept the new ideal. Every form of intolerance—and intolerance invariably implies misunderstanding—was alien to the doctrine of universal understanding. On the other hand, none were denied an entry into this spiritual guild. Anybody was eligible to become a humanist if he desired education and culture. Men of any class, and women too, nobles and priests, kings and merchants, the laity and the clergy, all had free





and French, to exclaim: "Why do such foolish names still exist to keep us sundered, since we are united in the name of Christ?" Disputes between Europeans seemed to the humanists to be the outcome of misunderstandings arising from too narrow-minded an outlook, too faulty an education; the duty of coming generations of Europeans would be to replace the vainglorious claims of petty princelings, of fanatical sectarians, and of national egoists, by sympathetic co-operation,









good things are shipwrecked.” He was the first man of letters to advocate pacifist ideals. During an era of perpetual warfare, he penned no fewer than five works attacking war; in 1504, an appeal to Philip the Handsome, King of Castile; in 1514, another to the Bishop of Cambrai in which we read, “as a Christian prince you might for Christ’s sake do your best to secure peace”; in 1515, the renowned essay in the *Adagia* which bears the eternally true title, “*Dulce helium inexpertis*” (only to





the princes. He considered Cicero was right when he said that an “unjust peace was preferable to the most just of wars.” A whole arsenal of arguments, to which we to-day might go in search of numberless weapons wherewith to attack war, was used by Erasmus, the lone fighter, against this plague. “When animals fall upon one another,” he writes, “I can understand and forgive, for they act in ignorance. But men should not need to be told that war is of necessity unjustifiable since, as a rule, it harms not so much

those who prepare for it and who carry it on; for usually the full burden of it falls upon innocent parties, upon the unhappy masses, who gain nothing either from victory or from defeat. The chief hurt accrues to those who have had nothing to do with it; and even when the luck of the fight is on our side, this good fortune for one spells misfortune for the other.” The idea of war cannot, therefore, find any *modus vivendi* with the idea of justice. Besides, he asks again, how could any war ever be justifiable? For



right, his right must not be defended by force and must never be achieved by force, for “war grows out of another war, and thus one war creates a second.”

A man of intellect could never look upon a decision arrived at by a call to arms as the moral solution of a conflict. Erasmus expressly declares that in case of war breaking out the men of intelligence and learning in every land must not renounce their friendship towards one another. Their attitude must never be to strengthen the contrasts in outlook among the nations,







“ecclesiastical warrior” is a contradiction to God’s holy word, for the term denies the sublimest message left by the Lord and Master when He said: “Peace be with you.”

Erasmus becomes passionate whenever he raises his voice against war, hatred, narrow-mindedness; but this passion of indignation never troubles the clarity of his outlook upon the world. Idealist at heart, and sceptical through his rational way of thinking, Erasmus knew all the oppositions which would















foes, adherents or  
opponents, heroes or  
criminals, believers or  
heretics; since it recognizes  
no other system than its  
own and no other truth  
than its own, it needs must  
resort to violence in order  
to curb and bridle the  
divine multiplicity of  
phenomena and to bring  
everything under one yoke.  
The forcible curtailment of  
mental latitude, of freedom  
of opinions, every kind of  
inquisition and censorship,  
of scaffold and stake—these  
evils were not brought into  
the world by blind violence,  
but by rigidly staring

fanaticism, that genius of one-sidedness, that hereditary enemy of universality, that captive of a single idea which would shut the whole world up in a cage.

Therefore Erasmus the humanist, who his lifelong was forever pointing to what was universal in mankind as being its loftiest and holiest possession, considered that the intellectual could shoulder no heavier burden of responsibility than when, by a one-sided ideology, he furnished the ever-ready will of the

masses with a pretext for deeds of violence, since thus he let loose primitive forces which far outran his intentions, and falsified his purposes however pure they might be. One man single-handed is capable of setting the hounds of passion into motion, but he is hardly ever capable of bringing them to heel again. He who breathes his word softly into sleeping fires must remember that he may fan these fires into destructive flames; he who arouses fanaticism by declaring that only one system of existence, of













shape and one colour. This is the sign-manual of the humanist: never to look upon contrasts with an inimical eye; always to work with a view to bringing about unity even where unity seems impossible to achieve; invariably to seek out what is human in everything. Since Erasmus endeavoured to conciliate within himself such apparently irreconcilable elements as Christianity and classical antiquity, free thought and theology, Renaissance and Reformation, he must have









the former lived the educated, the penetrating, the humanistic, the civilized. They fancied that the main business was accomplished when increasingly large portions of the lower layer were transferred satisfactorily to the upper. Just as in Europe an ever-increasing area of land was reclaimed and brought under the plough, whereas previously these lands had been the haunts of savage beasts, so also must it be with mankind. Gradually ignorance and roughness among the peoples of

Europe would be extirpated, to be substituted by cleared and fruitful zones of humanity. Thus religious thought would be replaced by the ideal of an uninterrupted ascent of man. The concept of a progressive evolution (at a later date to be converted into a scientific method by Darwin) became under the aegis of the humanists an ethical ideal towards which the men of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe strove. Even in our modern scheme, Erasmian ideas play an important part.









the nations were waging war or quarrelling; nevertheless the improvement they looked for was not to be brought about with the aid of the people at large, but over the heads of the masses. At bottom, humanism was, therefore, far from being a denial of the knightly order; it was a renewal of this order along intellectualist lines. The humanists hoped to conquer the world by means of the pen just as those others had conquered with the sword; and, like those others, all



Chytraeus, Dobnick became Cochlaus, and so forth. They were careful to array themselves in black clothing with ample folds, to differentiate themselves even outwardly from their fellow-citizens. It was considered to be beneath their dignity to write a book or a letter in the mother tongue, just as a knight would have been scandalized had he been asked to march forth to battle on foot amid the troops instead of mounted on horseback. Each felt it incumbent upon him to deport himself with special



Maximilian's bones. This was an order of the mind whose insignium was the book in place of the Gross. And, since the order of knighthood had had recourse to the uncouth violence of the cannon in order to maintain itself in power, this noble company of idealists would fight against the boorish impacts of the folk revolutionaries, Luther and Zwingli, with the no less effective weapon of beauty.

But such deliberate ignoring of the masses, such studied indifference towards the world of









as Erasmus was concerned; he considered the masses were unworthy the attention of a refined and educated man, and it would be beneath his dignity to woo the favours of “barbarians.” Thus, humanism was for the happy few, not for the broad multitude; it was never anything better than a kingdom set amid the clouds, lighting up for one moment the whole world, beautiful to contemplate, a pure picture painted by a creative mind looking down serenely from its unattainable heights upon

the tenebrous world below. Such an airy and artificial structure could make no stand against a genuine storm; it was doomed to perish unresistingly, and to fall into oblivion.

The tragical side of the humanistic movement, and, indeed, the cause of its decline, was that though the ideas which animated it were great, the men who were its prophets proved inadequate. As always with armchair philosophies, there was a tincture of the ludicrous in these well-meaning efforts to better

the world. Thoroughly earnest and honest, wearing their Latinized names as if they were intellectual masks, the protagonists suffered from a dash of pedantry and vanity, so that their loveliest theories were thinly coated with these two far from attractive qualities. Erasmus's pygmy followers are touching in their professorial and academic naivety, having much in common with the excellent persons we meet in philanthropic and universal improvement societies; theoretical



world aflame. Were a new Ciceronian manuscript discovered, the humanist clan went wild with excitement, fancying the whole world would reecho with the joyful tidings; every sympathetic pamphlet, be it never so unpretentious, roused their most ardent and passionate approval. But that which moved the man in the street, that which stirred the masses to the depths, all those things were outside the pale; they did not even wish to know about them; and, since they continued shut up in their

studies, the words they uttered lacked resonance, and could find no echo in the world of reality. It was owing to this disastrous seclusion, this absence of popularity, that the humanists were never able to produce harvest out of their fecund ideas. The immense optimism which inspired the whole of their work could not grow into a healthy and fruitful plant and develop adequately, because among these theoretical pedagogues of the idea of human progress, there was not one who possessed the power







understanding will be achieved is no longer so very far aloft. The Renaissance and the humanistic movement combined to create a moment of intense optimism throughout the western world. We cannot do otherwise than love this epoch and admire its wonderful illusion, since then, for the first time, mutual confidence arose among the peoples of Europe, inspiring them with the idea that a higher, more knowledgeable, and wiser humanity would be created, outstripping in

accomplishment even the civilizations of Greece and Rome.

And at the outset it seemed as if these optimists were right, for were not wonders and portents rife in those days, marvels superseding all that had hitherto gone to the making of the human story? Would it not seem that Durer and Leonardo were Zeuxis and Apelles reborn, that Michelangelo was a new Phidias? Did not science set order among the stars, and promulgate new laws for the terrestrial globe? Gold, streaming

from freshly discovered continents, created fabulous wealth, and this wealth begot new arts. Gutenberg's invention made the production of books so easy that the word of enlightenment could spread over the whole surface of the earth. Ah, it could not be long now, cried Erasmus and his disciples gleefully, before mankind, so lavishly endowed by the products of its own energies, would recognize its mission, its ethical purpose here below—to live in fraternal concord, to act uprightly,









## Chapter 7: THE TITANIC ADVERSARY

SELDOM do those decisive forces, destiny and death, visit man without a warning. Before every visit they send an envoy bearing a message, so softly spoken that the words go unheeded by the recipient. Among the innumerable letters of sympathy and respect which Erasmus received and which for so many years covered his writing-table, there came one, under date December 11, 1516, from Spalatinus,

secretary to the Elector of Saxony. In the course of a laudatory epistle interspersed with erudite comments, Spalatinus wrote that there was a young Augustinian friar in the town who felt a great respect for Erasmus's teaching but who differed from the master on the question of Original Sin. He was not a follower of Aristotle on the point that a man was righteous because he behaved righteously, but held that a man was righteous if he were given occasion to act righteously: "a person needs first a

change of heart, then good works will ensue.”

This letter is one of the minute stones which go to the composition of the vast mosaic known as the history of man. For the first time, though indirectly, Dr. Martin Luther—for the young Augustinian friar was none other than he—addressed the great master, and his initial protest already touched the central point around which the two paladins of the Reformation were in later years to fight as enemies. At the time when he received the letter,

Erasmus paid little heed to the impressions it conveyed. How should he, busy as he always was, wooed by the whole intellectual world, find time to dispute on theological matters with an obscure monk in the depths of Saxony? He passed the information by, little knowing that the hour had struck when his own life and that of the world at large were to take a new turn. So far he had stood alone, master of Europe and master of the new interpretation of the Gospels: now a mighty

opponent had arisen. With gentle finger, hardly audible, Martin Luther tapped at the door of Erasmus's heart; his name had not yet been mentioned, but before long that name was to sound throughout the world as the heir and conqueror of Erasmus.

This first encounter between Luther and Erasmus took place in the abstract world; and never in subsequent years were they destined to meet in person. A kind of instinct made the two men avoid















and physical aspects suffice to inform us that between such a couple no enduring friendship or understanding is possible. Sickly, trembling with cold in the shelter of his room, year in year out huddled in furs, perpetually below par (whereas Luther possessed an overplus of health), Erasmus always had too scant an allowance of everything with which his rival was abundantly supplied. Erasmus had to warm his sluggish and anaemic frame with good Burgundian wines, whereas Luther—contrasts in petty

things are sometimes the most salient—needed copious draughts of “strong Wittenberg beer” in order to dull his alertness into refreshing slumber at night. When Luther spoke, it was as though the house were filled with the rumble of thunder, the church with a mighty wind, the earth with the uproar of an earthquake; at table, in the company of friends, he would bellow with laughter, and he was so fond of music—indeed, theology alone stood above this love—that he enjoyed lifting up his sonorous

voice in song. Erasmus had a weak and gentle voice, resembling that of one suffering from consumption; he carefully trimmed and beautified his sentences, sharpening his words to the finest of points. Luther's speech rushed forth like a torrent, his quill moved with lightning speed "like a blind horse." Luther exhaled power; all who came into intimate contact with him, Melanchthon, Spalatinus, and even the Elector, were held in subservience to his domineering and virile







came his way, and warmed it in the hot stream of his rich red blood; he fecundated every idea with his own vital energy, imbuing it with fanaticism; and what he had once recognized and accepted, he remained faithful to all his life. Every concept coalesced with his whole being, and to it he imparted the full magnitude of his dynamic strength. Dozens of times did Luther and Erasmus utter the self-same thoughts, but whereas Erasmus exercised a titillating effect upon the

minds of intellectuals, Luther's words, thanks to his torrential impetus, immediately became a popular slogan, a call to arms, a formative demand, racing forth into the world like animated firebrands to kindle the consciences of men. All that Erasmus sought was peace and tranquillity of soul; all that Luther sought was to create a tension and a convulsion of the emotions. Erasmus, the *scepticus*, manifested his greatest strength when he spoke clearly, soberly, and collectedly; Luther, the *pater exstaticus*, was at his



fanatical, the most unteachable, the most intractable, and the most quarrelsome. He could only tolerate those who were completely acquiescent with his views, so that he could make what use he would of them; those who said him nay served him as targets for his wrath, and provided him with material to grind to powder with his scorn. Erasmus, however, had made anti-fanaticism a veritable cult, and Luther's harsh, dictatorial tones cut him to the quick. Pummelling, foaming at the mouth, violent words,



conviction which made it impossible to pin him down to some definite and unambiguous

pronouncement. The

perfect phraseology of the scholar's artistically ornate eloquence was gall and wormwood to the rougher and more downright rival.

There was something deep in Luther's nature, and something equally deep in Erasmus's nature; but the two depths were antagonistic. Foolish,

indeed, is the notion that nothing but externals and the hazards of life rendered it impossible for these two



and into the plexus of the instincts, through the channels where the blood coursed, or into those depths where conscious thought no longer governs. They could deal gently with one another for reasons of policy and out of consideration for the cause, like two logs carried down on the current of a stream they could drift comfortably side by side, but at the first bend, at the first loop in the river-bed, they were fated to ram one another. The conflict thus arising was inescapable and proved to be of world-



wide significance.

As was to be expected, the conqueror in this battle was Luther, not merely because he was the greater genius of the two, but also because he was more used to combat and was a merry fighter. Luther remained all his life of a pugnacious disposition, a born wrestler with God, with man, and with the devil. Warfare was for him not only a pleasure and an outlet for his energies, but likewise a means of salvation from himself. A skirmish, a quarrel, dissension,



he comes face to face with an opponent." It is undeniable that Luther fought like one possessed when he went forth to battle, fought with his whole body, fiercely, with bloodshot eyes, and foam on his lips; and his *furor teutonicus* seemed to act as a purge on the feverish poisons within him. In actual fact, it was only when striking out in a blind frenzy, releasing his anger, that he felt light-hearted. "My whole bloodstream is refreshed, my *ingenium* becomes clarified, and temptation is laid to rest."



adversary low. "If you want to better humanity and reform the Church you cannot afford to fight shy of a good, thumping lie." Chivalry was alien to this peasant fighter. Even when a foe had got his gruelling, Luther could not treat him with generosity or compassion, he continued to drub him in blind rage as the poor thing lay defenceless on the ground. Not for him the adage dear to the English: "Don't hit a man when he is down!" He rejoiced when he learned that Thomas Munzer with ten thousand peasants had

been done to death, and boasted that "their blood is on my head"; he shouted with glee when "that swine" Zwingli, together with Karlstadt and all those who opposed his ideas, perished miserably; never once did this hot and mighty hater put in a word to save an enemy condemned to death. From the pulpit his voice rang forth carrying men along in a stream of enthusiasm; in the home he was a cheerful and friendly father and house-master; as an artist in words he gave expression to the

magnitude of his cultural attainments; but so soon as battle was joined, Luther was transformed, becoming a werewolf raging with uncouth and unjustifiable scorn and fury. Out of the dire necessity of his nature he was again and again forced into combat; for, not only did he enjoy this, considering it to be the jolliest thing in life, but he looked upon a fight as, morally, the fairest and justest form of activity. "A man, and especially a Christian, must be a warrior," he said proudly as









beyond the borders of polite expression and decorum, he could not fathom why Luther should give himself up to such “bloodthirsty” hatred in his disputations with antagonists. Erasmus was not only a born pacifist, but his lack of positive conviction in his chosen articles of faith stressed the fact that he was no fighter; objective minds are usually lacking in self-confidence. Doubt comes only too easily to ruffle their clear surfaces, men of that calibre are given to reflecting upon the













proving a peculiarly sore one to the German folk, and one whereby Rome made its yoke most oppressively felt: the sale of indulgences. There is nothing a nation objects to more keenly than having to pay tribute to a foreign power; in this case, the Church traded upon a fundamental anxiety present in every religious mind, employing agents to sell papal indulgences on commission, engaging professional salesmen to convert the papal notes into coin of the realm. That the hard-earned money of









and demands of the people, the concentrated force of every opposition.

A contemporary as keen-eared and as clear-sighted as Erasmus must indubitably have heard very soon of Luther's action. It should have gladdened his heart to know that an ally of such calibre was at hand, and that he possessed a comrade who would fight shoulder to shoulder for free theology. At first, no word of censure passed Erasmus's lips. "The good must love Luther for his courage," and "Luther, so



Luther's. He sent out urgent warnings, begging his rival to use somewhat greater discretion. "It seems to me that gentleness achieves more than turbulence. It was through gentleness that Christ conquered the world." Thus, Erasmus was not disquieted by the actual words Luther spoke, nor by the phrasing of the theses, but by the tone of the ex-Augustinian's discourses, the demagogic and fanatical form which pervaded the man's every action. Such thorny problems in theology are,



maintained Erasmus, best discussed quietly and among persons of trained intelligence; the *profanum vulgus* should be held aloof by the use of the academic language—Latin. Theology should not be argued about from the house-tops and at every street corner; shopkeepers and cobblers were not fitted to discuss subtle things they were unable to understand. Every discussion held in public was considered by the humanists to lower the level of that same discussion, and inevitably to incur the risk of

degenerating into  
*tumultus*, into a riot of  
popular excitement.  
Propaganda and agitational  
work was proper and right,  
and Erasmus believed in  
their unflagging power. It  
seemed to him that once an  
idea had been launched  
upon the world by means  
of the written or spoken  
word, its significance and  
purport should be spread  
abroad along spiritual and  
intellectual paths; that it  
did not need the  
approbation of the masses  
or the formation of a party  
to render it truer and more  
actual. A man of intellect















was slowly being woven round Luther's purely ethical and moral claims. His intimate circle of adherents was on the lookout for allies, and Melanchthon, who knew very well what an uproar the publication of Luther's *An Address to the Nobility of the German Nation* would create, pressed the demand that so noteworthy an authority as Erasmus, celebrated for his unpartisanship throughout the scholarly world, should be won over to the evangelical cause. In the end Luther yielded, and on





notice this poor little brother in Christ, who is certainly unworthy your attention since his ignorance keeps him buried away in a dark corner, and who can claim no right to live under the same heaven and the same sun as you. ...” The whole letter was written in order to lead up to this sentence. It contains all that Luther hoped to gain from Erasmus, which was a letter of acquiescence, a word of friendly approval of the writer’s teaching, a line which would be (as we say nowadays) of “publicity











hawing, and informing Luther that he had not read the latter's writings carefully enough to give an opinion. In actual fact, wrote Erasmus, since he had been ordained a priest of the Roman Catholic dispensation, it was strictly forbidden him to read any work antagonistic to the Church. Thus he provided himself with a clever excuse for evading the issue. He thanked his "brother in Christ," telling him of the immense excitement Luther's books had raised in Louvain and how hatefully those in



only fluttered the pages” (*degustavi*), i.e. he had not read this work either. He hoped that it would prove of great utility—again an evasive wish and conveying no definite judgment. Then, in order to widen the distance between Luther and himself, Erasmus made fun of the rumour that he was one of the committee engaged upon composing an indictment against Luther’s works; the notion was ludicrous and malevolent. At the close however, Erasmus became clear-spoken. Curtly and without circumlocution he

declared that he had no wish to be drawn into the discussion. “So far as maybe I wish to keep neutral (*integrum*) in order to continue to do my share in promoting the nascent sciences; and I believe that a shrewdly manipulated reticence will achieve more than impetuous interference.” Urgently he begged Luther to show more moderation, winding up with the pious and noncommittal hope that Christ might endow the Augustinian from day to day with an increasing measure of His divine

spirit.

Therewith Erasmus took his stand, the same he had taken during the Reuchlin affair when he proclaimed: "I am not a member of Reuchlin's party; indeed I refuse to have anything to do with party. I am a Christian and recognize the existence of fellow-Christians. But I refuse to be either a Reuchliner or an Erasmian." He was determined not to budge an inch farther than he wished to go. He was of an anxious turn of mind; but anxiety sharpens the faculty of observation so









any cause in common with others, Luther's not excepted. Luther must go his own way, and Erasmus must be allowed to go his; they therefore came to an agreement that neither should enter into open conflict with the other. The offer of an alliance having been rejected, they concluded a pact of mutual tolerance. Luther's role was to furnish the dramatic element, and Erasmus hoped—vainly as it proved!—to be permitted to play the part of onlooker, of “spectator.” “If God, as may be surmised by the

magnificent swing with which Luther's cause has gone forward, wishes that matters should run this course and needs a rough-handed surgeon like Luther to heal the sores of a degenerate epoch, it is not for me to question His wisdom."

Nevertheless, in times of war it is a harder task to keep out of the fray and to preserve a perfect mental poise than to take sides; and, much to his vexation, Erasmus found himself between the cross-fires of parties each of which wanted to claim him as



ajar, Luther turbulently flung it wide. Erasmus himself had to admit, when writing to Zwingli: "Everything which Luther is demanding, I, too, have taught, but not so vociferously and without going to such extremes of language." Method alone divided these two men. They both made the same diagnosis: that the Church was in mortal peril of a hopeless inward rot while preserving the outward semblance of stability. But whereas Erasmus proposed gradual amelioration, a careful and progressive



concerned. I know that many of Luther's followers act upon the saying, 'I come not to send peace, but a sword.' Though I see much in the Church that it might advantage religion to change, I am averse to any action which might lead to commotion and uproar." With the determination worthy of a Tolstoi, he refused to admit that an appeal to force was legitimate, declaring himself ready to continue suffering an abuse rather than to raise a *tumultus* by resorting to violence and bloodshed. While his









endeavouring to put a curb upon Luther. Through the intermediation of mutual friends he besought Luther to be less incendiary in his writings, to teach the Gospel in less “unevangelical” terms. “I wish Luther could make up his mind to forgo quarrelling for a while, and could deal with evangelical reform without mixing it with other things. He would thus achieve even greater success.” Above all, it was unwise to discuss every question in public; especially, the demand for reforms within the Church

was not a suitable subject to shout about from the house-tops to a contentious and brawling mob. The diplomat in Erasmus led him to belaud that virtue of the man of intellect, the sublime art of silence at the proper season in contradistinction to the agitator's art of oratory. "We must not invariably tell the whole truth. Much depends upon how truth is made known." The mere suggestion that truth might be withheld for mundane advantages, were it but for a moment, was, it need hardly be said, utterly





hammer-blows upon the church door at Wittenberg. Each estate, princes and peasants and burghers alike, felt that their personal claims and their rights as citizens had been hallowed by the Gospels. The entire nation, hitherto rent by local squabbles, put its passionate trust in Luther because in him it saw a man of courage and of action. Now, whenever the national cause and social demands are mixed in the same crucible with religious ecstasy, an earthquake is engendered, shaking the world to its

foundations; and should, moreover (as was the case with Luther), a man appear at the appropriate hour whom the multitude can recognize as the embodiment of their own unconscious will, that man will become the vehicle of magical powers. He who, at a word, is chosen to guide the mighty energies of a nation, is often tempted to look upon himself as a messenger from the godhead. Thus after incalculable years a man arose in Germany speaking with the tongue of the prophets. "God has





which God has whispered His divine injunctions, is obviously to waste one's breath. Soon Luther came to pay no heed whatsoever to what Erasmus wrote or thought; the younger man no longer needed the older. With iron strides, and inexorably, Luther marched forward along the path which destiny had traced for him.

With the same energy he had expended in warning Luther, Erasmus now turned to admonish the other side — pope, bishops, princes, and those set in authority. In this camp,



mediator, thereby  
vindicating Luther's  
attitude. Even though  
writing about his bitterest  
foe, Erasmus could still  
declare that "Luther acted  
precipitately, maybe, but  
certainly not with evil  
intent." In such  
circumstances, it was not  
imperative to clamour  
immediately for the stake,  
and not every suspect could  
be rightfully accused of  
heresy. Would not the  
wiser course be to give  
Luther a warning, and to  
enlighten him rather than  
to insult and irritate him?  
"The best way of coming to



But Rome paid as little attention to this warning voice as to the wordy fireworks of Wittenberg. The pope was busied with other cares than these: his beloved Raphael Sanzio, the divinest gift of the Renaissance to the new times, died suddenly at this juncture. Who would now finish the Vatican cartoons? Who would step forward to complete the decoration of St. Peter's, a work so boldly conceived and so magnificently begun? To the popes of the Medici family, art was greater and more enduring

and a hundredfold more important than a pettifogging dispute among churchmen in an obscure town in the province of Saxony; and precisely because the reigning pope was a man of wide vision, he failed to see the significance of the gesticulating little monk who was busily undermining the papal realm. His cardinals, arrogant and self-confident—had they not a couple of decades earlier successfully committed Savonarola to the flames and ruthlessly expelled the



right, obstinacy to the left made conciliation between the two camps impossible of achievement.

Yet in these decisive days—and hitherto historians have been prone to neglect the study of the background against which the events were enacted—the destiny of the German Reformation was for a while entirely in Erasmus's hands. Emperor Charles had summoned the Diet of Worms. Here the Luther affair was to be liquidated, unless he yielded at the eleventh hour. Frederick,











and upright man, did not yet feel certain whether this priest and professor was in verity a herald of evangelical teaching or merely another of the numerous religious enthusiasts and sectarians. He could not decide whether before God and before earthly reason he could make himself further responsible in regard to this great and yet menacing spirit.

Such was Frederick's mood when, on his way through Cologne, he learned that Erasmus was staying in that city. He lost











laying hands on their bellies. Then, being earnestly besought to give a serious reply, he set forth his ideas concerning Luther's doctrines in twenty-two short propositions which he named *Axiomata*.

Occasional sentences ring a trifle censorious, such as "Luther misjudges the leniency of the pope." But in the more important conclusions Erasmus stood courageously by the side of his threatened colleague.

"Among the many universities, two only have been found to condemn





during that night's lengthy conversation. Next day, November 6th, Frederick asked the papal legate to hold a public inquiry, to appoint trustworthy and unshackled judges, and not to have Luther's books burned before the matter had been thoroughly thrashed out. Simultaneously, he entered a protest against the harsh standpoint of Rome and the emperor, thereby for the first time voicing the Protestantism of the German princes. By working behind the scenes, Erasmus was able in a

weighty hour to give decisive help, and this secret intervention has earned him a monument rather than the stones which have been hurled against him.

Followed the Diet of Worms, an epoch-making event. The town was full, every house packed to the roof and even to the tops of the gables to witness the entry of the young emperor, who had been crowned only a few months earlier. He was accompanied by legates, ambassadors, electors, secretaries, surrounded by









he was sitting tranquilly within the four walls of his study. He who had been Jerome Aleander's friend in their young days, who had shared bed and board with him in Venice, he who had been *persona grata* with the recently-crowned emperor, and was a sympathizer with evangelical views, was the only man who could have influenced the situation, and at least have obtained a postponement of sentence. But he dreaded a public appearance, and it was not until the evil tidings were brought to





## Chapter 8: STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

ERASMUS imagined—and most of his contemporaries shared his outlook—that the Diet of Worms, the ban of outlawry issued by the pope, and the ban of the empire proclaimed by the young emperor, would have settled Luther's activities for ever. The only course that remained open was rebellion against Church and State, a new Albigensian or Waldensian or Hussite conflagration.

This solution spelled war, and war was an activity Erasmus wanted above all to avoid. His dream had been to reform from within the evangelical teaching of Mother Church, and he would gladly have given his support to any movement of the kind he contemplated. "If Luther remains within the fold of the Church, I shall be happy to rally to his side," he declared in public. But with one blow and a wrench the fiery Titan had severed his connexions with Rome. Erasmus's dream was at an end. "The

Luther tragedy is finished. Ah, that it had never been staged!” Thus did our lover of peace exclaim in the bitterness of his disillusionment. The tiny flame of evangelical inquiry had been snuffed out, the star of intellectual freedom had set, *actum est de stellula lucis evangelicae*. Henceforward the familiars of the Inquisition and the heavy artillery would have to decide the issue. Erasmus, feeling himself too weak to stand so great a test, decided to keep in the background of events. Humbly he recognized that









the contrary of that which its moving spirits had set out to attain. Never have I, nor shall I, become an inciter to or a participator in an insurrection." Thus Erasmus withdrew from the ecclesiastical hurly-burly into the serene domains of art, science, and his own work. He felt nauseated by the continued yapping and disputing of the factions. "*Consulo quieti mea*" peace will I have, the "*otium cum dignitate*," the dignified ease of the scholar. But he reckoned without the world, and this refused to

give him what he wanted. There are epochs wherein neutrality is stigmatized as a crime; during times of extreme political excitement the world insists upon a clear Yes or No, an affirmation of support or of disapproval, a distinct declaration of "I am for Luther or I am for the pope." The town of Louvain, where he now lived, made it difficult for him to secure the peace he so greatly desired; and whereas Reformation Germany blamed him for his Laodicean attitude towards Luther's teaching,













feel genuinely happy. Basle became the resting-house of his earthly pilgrimage. He lived in this town longer than in any other, a whole eight years, and with the passage of time the two names, Erasmus and Basle, have become inseparable: one cannot nowadays think of Erasmus without calling up the vision of Basle, or of Basle without picturing Erasmus. His house is still kept intact and preciously conserved, the walls hung with some of Holbein's portraits of the sage which will carry his lineaments down to countless

generations to come. In this abode most of Erasmus's finest works were written, above all the *Colloquia*, that sparkling Latin dialogue which was first conceived as a primer for young Frobenius, and was destined to become a Latin text-book for innumerable children during future decades. Here he completed his great edition of the Fathers of the Church, and hence he sent letters to all the corners of the earth. Here, entrenched in the citadel of work, he could pursue his labours, untroubled by the

clamour without; book after book issued from his pen, and when intellectual Europe wished to look upon its leader it gazed upon the regal city on the farther shores of the Rhine. During the period of Erasmus's residence there, Basle became the intellectual Alsatia. Humanistic pupils gathered round the celebrated scholar, Oecolampadius for instance, Rhenanus, Amerbach. No man of note, no prince, no scholar, no friend of the fine arts ever missed seeking out



true combat is outside your study walls; it is a life-and-death struggle; the spirit has become biased, and the opponents have joined battle: a free man, a man of independent mind, a man who holds aloof, can no longer be tolerated. The world war rages and you needs must be either for or against the evangelical renewal; it no longer helps you to sit among your books behind closed windows. Now that, from one end of Europe to the other, Luther has split the Christian world in twain, it behoves you to cease



intellectual leader, stands; whether he is for Luther or against him, whether he is for the pope or against him.

A shattering drama is about to fill the stage. The world's ardent desire is to get hold of a man weary of war, and to drag him into the struggle. "It is a misfortune," laments Erasmus at the age of fifty-five, "that this world-wide storm should have caught me unprepared, should have overtaken me at the moment when, weary from my manifold labours, I was looking forward to a period





him as an authority. The leaders on both fronts tore and tugged in order to win him to their particular cause. They lured him with offers of money, with flattery; they taunted him for cowardice, hoping thereby to induce him to break his prudent silence; they alarmed him with false reports, saying that in Rome his books had been confiscated and burned; they falsified his letters; they twisted the meaning of his words. In such circumstances, the true worth of a man of independent mind shines









forth and speak the words that would decide the issue for himself and for all the world. To show how profound was the general belief in his integrity, I need but quote a moving appeal from the very heart of one of the noblest of Germans. Albrecht Durer, while travelling in the Netherlands, had made Erasmus's acquaintance. When, a few months later, it was bruited abroad that Luther's cause was dead, Durer looked to Erasmus as the only man alive who was worthy to carry the sacred cause a stage





? Let thy voice be heard, then the doors of hell, the papal chair, as Christ says, cannot prevail against thee. Bestir thyself, Erasmus, that thou mayest overthrow Goliath, to become the man after God's own heart, as did David of old."

Thus thought Durer, together with the whole of Germany. No less did the Catholic Church set her hopes on Erasmus in her deadly need, and Christ's representative on earth, the pope himself, wrote a letter couched in almost identical terms. "Step forth, step

forth and support Christ's cause! Use your wonderful gifts to God's honour and glory. Bethink you that, with God's aid, you are capable of winning back most of those who have been led astray by Luther, setting their feet once more in the right path, of securing that all those who have not yet been seduced shall remain steadfast, and of persuading those who are about to stray to remain within the fold." The lord of Christendom and his bishops; the rulers of the world, Henry VIII of England, Charles V,

Francis I of France, Ferdinand of Austria, and the Duke of Burgundy, were on one side—while on the other, were the leaders of the Reformation, every one of them beseeching Erasmus, as during the Trojan war did Homeric princes outside the tent of the sulking Achilles, to bestir himself, to come out of his lethargy and enter the arena. The scene is majestically set. Seldom, indeed, have the mighty of the earth struggled for an utterance from one single individual, seldom has the supremacy of the mind

been so victoriously manifested. But we have to realize the hidden cleavage in Erasmus's character. Never did he give these wooers who hung upon his every word a definite and heroic "I will not." He could not muster strength enough for an open, decisive, and unambiguous pronouncement. With neither party did he care to throw in his lot—and this, after all, does him credit, for it proves his spiritual independence. The unfortunate thing was, however, that he also did not wish to be in either

party's bad graces, and that deprives his attitude of dignity. He dared not enter into open opposition with any of these persons of importance, all of whom were his benefactors or his admirers or his supporters, so he fobbed them off with evasions and divagations; he tried to side-track them, he temporized, he caracoled—how can one describe the unsatisfactoriness of his behaviour except by the use of some such words as these?—promising and hesitating, writing down binding words which failed



after year; and Erasmus resorted to the same methods in his dealings with Melanchthon and Zwingli, temporizing with them in flattering epistles. He knew hundreds of ways of wriggling out of his difficulty. And yet, behind this unpleasing facade of machinations there was hidden a resolute will. "If there be a man who cannot esteem Erasmus because he appears to be an unreliable Christian, let him think what he will of me. I cannot be other than I am. If Christ has endowed another with rarer mental





since I do not trust my own reason in all things, I prefer to step aside and not force myself to agree or to disagree with another man's mode of thought. My one wish is that all of us should unite to bring about the victory of the Christian cause and the triumph of that peace which is spoken of in the Gospels, to bring this about without violence, and by means of truth and reasonableness, so that in the end we shall understand one another perfectly, both as to priestly dignity and the freedom of the people

whom our Lord Jesus Christ desired to see free. All those who, according to their capacities, will work towards this goal will have Erasmus as comrade in the fight. But if any should wish to drag me into the confusion, for him Erasmus will be neither a leader nor a companion.”

His resolution was unshakable, and so he kept pope, emperor, kings, and reformers like Luther, Melanchthon, and Durer, waiting year after year, and none of them was able ever to force from his lips the decisive word they

expected. He smiled politely down upon his interlocutors, and his mouth remained sealed forever.

But there was one man alive who refused to wait, an ardent and impatient warrior in the spirit's cause, resolute in his determination to cut the Gordian knot. This doughty knight was named Ulrich von Hutten, the "Knight who fought against Death and the Devil," the Archangel Michael of the German Reformation. He had looked up to Erasmus



Muses,” for he delighted in the glowing youth of the man who had sung rapturously like a lark at heaven’s gate, “*O saeculum, o littera! Juvat vivere!*” How confident is this exclamation, “It is a joy to be alive!” Erasmus had hoped to train the stripling to solid scholarship and to make of him a new master of the sciences. Soon, however, political activities had severed pupil from teacher; the airless rooms and the bookish knowledge of the humanists became too confined for Hutten. The young knight, son of a

knight, drew the gauntlet  
on once more; he no longer  
wanted to wield the pen  
but a sword against pope  
and clerics. Although he  
had won his laureate's  
crown for Latin verse, he  
flung this foreign tongue  
aside in order that he  
might in the German  
vernacular summon his  
fellows to the fight for  
German evangelical  
teaching:

*In Latin did I often write—  
This was not known to  
everyone.*

*Now call I to my  
fatherland.*

But Germany would not tolerate him and drove him forth; in Rome he barely escaped arrest and assassination. Banished from home and from court, a beggar and prematurely old, undermined in health by the “malady of France” (as syphilis was then called), covered with sores, with the last strength at his command he dragged himself to Basle. He was thirty-five years old. In Basle lived his great friend, the “Light of Germany,” his teacher, his master, his protector: Erasmus. The





disadvantage as under this soul-shattering test. Erasmus refused to admit Hutten to his house. Already in Louvain Erasmus had found this “quarrelsome brawler” very hard to stomach; and when the poet had urged his master to declare war on the clergy, Erasmus had curtly declared: “My business is to further the cause of education.” Now he felt no inclination to receive the fanatic who had sacrificed the Muse of poetry upon the altar of politics; he would have nothing to do with this



this *egens et omnibus rebus destitutes*, this beggar who had lost everything he possessed, might ask for shelter beneath Erasmus's roof and remain to be a pecuniary burden for the rest of his life; and, thirdly, because the fellow who had ventured to admonish the pope and had incited the German nation to take up arms against the priesthood might compromise the attitude of non-partisanship Erasmus had adopted. He turned Hutten from his door, not with a definite "I don't













as envious of the growing renown of another (a shrewd blow for Luther's camp), accused him of fickleness, poured ridicule upon his weaknesses, crying aloud so that the whole of Germany should hear the words: "Though Erasmus is in the bottom of his heart at one with the evangelical cause he has shamefully betrayed it." From the deathbed, Hutten summoned Erasmus before a world tribunal, to show his colours, to declare himself against the Reformation since he had not the courage to come













tenets, let them think what they will, I cannot do so. I love freedom, and I will not and cannot serve any party.”

The vigorous counter-attack never touched Ulrich von Hutten. By the time it was printed and put into circulation the dauntless fighter had gone to his long rest where the gentle lapping of the waves lulled him in his lonely grave. Death had conquered Hutten before the mortal blow launched by Erasmus could reach him. But even in death, Hutten, the



mighty defeated, gained one final victory. He achieved what neither emperor nor kings, what neither pope nor clergy with all the power of authority behind them, had been able to achieve; his biting sarcasms had drawn Erasmus from his lair. For, having publicly been held up to ridicule on account of his poltroonery and vacillation, Erasmus was forced to demonstrate that he was not afraid of a scuffle with the greatest of his antagonists, with Luther himself. He had now to “show his colours,”

he had now to take a side. It was with a heavy heart that Erasmus set to work. He was an old man who desired nothing more from life than peace and tranquillity. Nor was he deceived as to the position in respect of Luther's cause; he knew that it had long since become too powerful to be shuffled out of existence with a stroke of the pen. He knew that no one would be convinced by his eloquence, that he could change nothing, and better nothing. Lacking pleasure in, lacking any desire for the undertaking,



## Chapter 9: SETTLEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

LITERARY gossip is not peculiar to one epoch; it is with us always. Even in the sixteenth century, when men of learning were but thinly strewn over the land, nothing could be kept secret from these inquisitives. Before Erasmus had taken his pen in hand, before even he was certain that he would enter the fray, they knew in Wittenberg what had been planned in Basle. Luther was counting upon the











of reconciliation—but the hand was already wearing an iron gauntlet.

The opening words of this missive are polite and restrained. “I have been sitting quiet long enough, my dear Herr Erasmus, and though I have been waiting for you, as the greater man and the elder of us twain, to make the first move to break the silence between us, yet after so long a wait, my love urges me to make a beginning myself, by writing to you. I have no objections to make in regard to your dealings



refrain from devoting your gifts to mingling in our affairs; for although, with your standing and your eloquence, you might achieve much, yet it would be better, since your heart is not with us, for you to serve God only with the talent He confided to your safe keeping.” He goes on to regret Erasmus’s weaknesses and aloofness; then, in the end, he hurls forth the decisive word, crying that the importance of the matter had now far overreached Erasmus’s goal, that it would not endanger him (Luther) if



Erasmus. “There has been enough biting; we must now see to it that we do not tear one another to pieces and destroy each other.”

Such high-handed letters had never come Erasmus’s way. The prince of the humanistic realm, despite his serenity of mind, could not endure that the man who had of yore addressed him so humbly, asking for protection, should now challenge him so derogatorily, treating him as a babbler of no importance. So he answered proudly: “I have worked better on behalf of



forth against Luther he would have gained the thanks and approbation of the mighty. But perhaps one did better service to the cause of the Gospels by entering the field against Luther than did those fools who so loudly clamoured in his name and on account of whom it was impossible to remain merely an onlooker at the tragedy. Luther's uncompromising attitude had hardened Erasmus's wavering will. "Ah, that it may not end in tragedy," he moaned in vague anticipation. Then he took up his pen, his only

weapon, once again.

Erasmus knew very well that his opponent was a Titan; at the bottom of his heart, he may also have realized Luther's superiority as a fighter, and the vigour of his rages against which no opposition seemed able to prevail. But Erasmus's strength lay in the fact that he knew his own limitations, and this is very rare in a man of artistic temperament. He knew that an intellectual tourney was being played before the eyes of the whole world,







dialectical ground of a question in theology upon which the iron-fisted opponent was unable to strike him to earth, and in which he knew that he would have the invisible backing and protection of the philosophers of every epoch.

The problem selected by Erasmus as the basis of discussion has been a bone of contention among theologians down the ages: the question of the freedom or the non-freedom of the human will. Luther, following the traditional Augustinian teaching of

predestination, maintained that man remained forever God's captive. He possesses not an iota of free will; every action he performs is known by God beforehand and is traced out by divine ordinance. By no good works, by no *bona opera*, by no contrition is man able to put his own will in motion, to liberate himself from the entanglement caused by antecedent sin; God's grace alone is competent to lead man along the right path. In modern phraseology we should say: our individual destiny is governed entirely























their fanatical leaders, so that, as he said, his words became “fleshly,” and took on a crude agitational colour. The same fate befalls every revolution; one wave succeeds another. If Erasmus may be likened to the Girondins, then Luther may be compared with the Jacobins, and Thomas Munzer and his followers with the ultra-Jacobins such as Marat. He, who had hitherto been undisputed leader, was suddenly to carry on the fight along two fronts simultaneously, against the lukewarm and against the







against the princes, now to repudiate those who were fighting along the path he had pointed out, those who, at his summons, and in the name of evangelical freedom, had become disloyal to the princes? For the first time in his life (his situation having suddenly changed to something extraordinarily similar to that of Erasmus) Luther endeavoured to deal with the crisis "Erasmianly." He warned the princes to exercise moderation, he warned the peasantry not "to bring disgrace upon the name of Christianity by

deeds of violence, by impatience, and unchristianly behaviour.” But—and this was a terrible blow to a man equipped with Luther’s colossal self-confidence—the common people no longer hearkened to his voice, but, rather, to those who promised them most, to Thomas Munzer and the communistic theologians. In the end he was forced to a decision, for the unbridled upheaval threatened to compromise his work; and he realized that the internecine struggle would hamper his





ranged himself with authority and against the people. "The donkey needs a thrashing, and the brute populace must be governed by brute force." Not a word did this berserker find to say on behalf of clemency when the conquering knighthood suppressed the peasant revolt with abominable ruthlessness; he had no pity for the innumerable victims, for in his wrath he knew no measure; not a syllable would he utter on behalf of the thousands who had put their trust in him, and who had been initiated by him

into the art of insurrection against their overlords. In the end he acknowledged with a grim courage, when the fields of Wurtemberg were running with blood: "I, Martin Luther, have slain all the peasants who died during this rebellion, for I goaded authority to the slaughter. Their blood be on my head."

This "furor," this tremendous power for hating, still whetted his quill when he turned it against Erasmus in his reply. He might have forgiven his rival's

theological excursus, but the enthusiastic welcome given to it in the wide realm of humanistic culture fanned the flames of his wrath till it became raving madness. Luther winced at the notion that his enemies were intoning a song of triumph. "Tell me, where is the doughty Maccabaeus, where is he who is so sure of his teaching?" Now that the peasant trouble lay behind him, he would not only answer Erasmus, but crush him out of existence. While at board with some friends he made known his





of genius, was never false to the German language. He knew how formidable was his antagonist, and, conscious of this, his work took on the proportions of greatness. It was a book on the grand scale, going to the root of things, of a wide compass, sparkling with images, glowing with passion, a book which, in addition to its vast erudition, displays more magnificently than any of his other works his imaginative and human powers. *De servo arbitrio* (a treatise upon the servitude of the will) is one









whole world should be filled with unrest and should sink into decay and ruin. Since Erasmus in his attack warned him to be cautious and quoted certain ambiguities in the biblical texts, dubious points which no mortal should venture to interpret with absolute confidence and self-assuredness, Luther yelled: "Without certitude, Christianity cannot exist. A Christian must be sure of his doctrine and his cause, or he is no Christian." He who hesitates, is lukewarm, or filled with doubts, should

once and for all leave theology alone. "The Holy Ghost is not a sceptic," he thundered forth in another place. "He has not inspired our hearts with some vague illusion, but has planted a strong certainty there." Obstinate, Luther clings to his outlook that man can only be good if he carries God in his heart, and he is bad when the Devil rides on his back; his own will remains unsubstantial, and is powerless against the inevitable and immutable prevision of God. Gradually, out of the single problem, out of this single











meddling with problems which can only be elucidated by the inner certitude of a believing, of a completely believing, mortal. Dictatorially, Erasmus was ordered once and for all to refrain from intervening in the religious struggle which by now had become a matter of world-wide importance: "God has not blessed you with strength sufficient to be of use to the cause, nor did He wish you to have such powers." He, Luther, however, felt the call, and thus his conscience gave him a sense of certainty:

“What or who I am, and for what purpose and in what spirit I have become mixed in this fight I leave to God who knows all; that which I perform was not initiated through my will but through His divine and free will, and it is through Him that I have accomplished the tasks under my hand.”

Thus was the issue between the humanists and the reformers settled. The Erasmian spirit and the Lutheran, reason versus passion, a religion of humanity as against a fanatical belief, supranationality and

nationality, versatility and one-sidedness, flexibility and rigidity, all these disparate things were and are as little able to combine as fire and water. Whenever they encounter one another here below, they engender rage and wrath, setting up one element to fight the other.

Luther never forgave Erasmus the public attack the latter had made upon him. This combative man could not brook any other end to a fight than that his adversary be completely overthrown. Whereas









Luther was the man of wrath personified, though in battle his eyes became bloodshot, he was not always at war, but had, on account of his doctrine and its influence, at times to exercise the arts of diplomacy. Maybe his friends drew his attention to the fact that it was unwise to bespatter the old man with such intolerable abuse, seeing that Erasmus was esteemed and honoured throughout the length and breadth of Europe. Anyway after a year of terrific diatribes against this “greatest





widespread suffering and the incurable confusion for which we have no one to thank but yourself, with your unbridled ways, and the impossibility of getting you to follow good counsel. ... I could have wished you to possess another kind of mentality than the one you possess, the one you admire so greatly. You may wish me anything you like with the exception of this mentality of yours. May the Lord intervene to change it!”

Thus, with a harshness quite foreign to his nature, Erasmus rejected Luther’s













## Chapter 10: THE END

ERASMUS was sixty years of age; he was weary and worn out. Once again, this time in Freiburg, he sat behind his books, a fugitive—how many times before had he played the same role?—a fugitive from the rush and turmoil of the world. His delicate frame seemed to shrink in size as the years sped by, his sensitive face with its network of wrinkles and folds came increasingly to resemble a parchment inscribed with mystic runes





intelligence surveyed. One friend alone, his oldest, best, and trustworthiest friend, shared study and writing-table with him: Dame Work. Each day he wrote thirty to forty letters, he filled folio after folio of translations from the Fathers, he added to his *Colloquia*, and composed innumerable works dealing with morals and aesthetics. He wrote and wrought with the consciousness of a man who believed in the right and the duty of reason, and who had set himself the task of announcing its undying truth to a









epoch of political turmoil, to act as mediator and to compose differences. The exalted dream of a spiritually-united, humanistic Europe had come to an end; and he who had dreamed this dream, Erasmus, now a tired old man, was no longer of any use, for no one hearkened to his message. The world of men passed him by; he was not needed any more.

Nevertheless, before a candle goes out it flutters up into a sturdy flame ere it dies. Before an idea can be





the new ideas, to “summon a council of wise and unprejudiced men,” so that they might in Christian love and charity listen to every argument, and select those points which could serve as foundation for a united and renewed Christian Church. With this goal in view, the Emperor Charles V called the Diet of Augsburg.

The Diet of Augsburg proved to be one of the most momentous events in the history of the German people, and, indeed, in the history of the world; one of those events that can never

recur and which are pregnant with possibilities for the coming centuries. To outward appearance, the Diet of Augsburg was less dramatic than that held at Worms some years previously, but it certainly did not lag behind the earlier one so far as its lasting historical importance was concerned. Now, as then, the point at issue was the spiritual and intellectual unity of the western world.

At the outset, the Diet of Augsburg was extraordinarily favourable to the Erasmian idea, that

of a conciliatory discussion between the opponents. Both parties to the dispute, the old Church and the new, were going through a severe crisis, and were, therefore, ripe for an understanding. The Catholic Church had lost much of its whilom arrogance, and no longer looked disdainfully down upon “the insignificant German heretic,” for she realized that the Reformation movement had kindled a blaze throughout northern Europe, a conflagration which was spreading



further and further over the land. The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, and (this was the cruellest blow) England had gone over to the new doctrines; everywhere the penurious rulers were realizing how conveniently they could fill their treasuries by closing down the religious establishments and confiscating ecclesiastical possessions in the name of Holy Writ. The ancient weapons of Mother Church, excommunication, exorcism, and the like, did not impose upon people



since the exciting and heroic days at Worms. In the evangelical camp, likewise, “the loving concord of the Church” had been rent and torn. Ere Luther had been given time to organize a compact congregation of the faithful, rivals had entered the field. There were Zwingli and Karlstadt and Henry VIII and the sects of the zealots and the Anabaptists to contend with. This fanatical believer had come to realize that what he desired to establish on the spiritual plane was being













and assistant Luther ever had, remained all his life the faithful disciple of Erasmus. His whole nature, his attitude of mind throughout the conflict, made him sympathetic to the humanistic and humane ideas of Luther's most formidable opponent, and his concept of evangelical teaching ran better in harness with Erasmus's than with the less malleable and severe formula of Luther. But nevertheless Luther's personality and strength worked suggestively upon Melanchthon. In

Wittenberg, in Luther's immediate neighbourhood, Melanchthon felt himself completely subservient to Luther's will; he served the master humbly and with all the zeal his clear-thinking and organizing mind was capable of. In Augsburg, however, away from the hypnotic influence of the master, the other side, the Erasmian side of Melanchthon's nature could be given free play. During the Diet at Augsburg he went out of his way to be conciliatory, going so far in his concessions that his feet

almost led him back into the fold of the Roman communion. He himself was responsible for the “Augsburg Confession.” Luther could never “have trod so softly and gently.” This document, in spite of its unambiguous and artistic phraseology, was in no way provocative and could not wound the pride of the Catholic Church. During the discussions, too, many highly controversial points were passed over in silence. Thus, the doctrine of predestination, about which Luther and Erasmus

had fought so bitterly, was not referred to, nor was the thorny problem of the divine right of the papacy mentioned, nor the “character indelebilis,” the inalienable quality of priesthood, nor the seven sacraments. From either side, conciliatory words were spoken. Melanchthon wrote: “We respect the authority of the pope and the Church so long as the pope of Rome refrains from casting us out.” A representative of the Vatican, on the other hand, made a semi-official declaration that such



closely associated (the former by sympathy and the latter by fidelity), might have been brought to a unity which would have saved the ideal of a united European Christendom?

The only man then living who might have brought this miracle to pass was Erasmus, and Emperor Charles V, the ruler of two worlds, had sent him a special invitation to be present at the Diet, conjuring him to give advice and to act as mediator. But Erasmus's tragical destiny recapitulated itself. Again,







right man, the man of genial and conciliatory habit, was lacking. Discussion followed upon discussion and the idea of conciliation was ground between the upper and the nether millstones of the old and the new Churches. The Diet of Augsburg rent Christendom in twain, and yet it had been summoned with a view to bringing the parties together in a spirit of concord. Henceforward there were to be two faiths, and instead of peace the world knew only strife. Luther harshly drew his conclusions: "If war comes





humanism which Erasmus had built was overrun by enemy hordes and wellnigh conquered; gone were the days of *eruditio et eloquentia*; men no longer hearkened to the subtle and delicate message of imaginative genius, but turned their ears to listen to the rough and passion-wrought babble of politics. Thought had succumbed to mob-frenzy, it had donned the uniform of Luther or of the pope; the erudite no longer waged war in elegantly phrased epistles and books, but, like fishwives, hurled gross

invectives at each other's heads; none was willing to understand what his neighbour said, but instead each tried to impose his own pet belief, his particular doctrine, upon all the rest. Woe unto him who stood aside and took no part in the game! Twofold hatred was hurled against those who remained aloof. Those who live for the spirit are lonely indeed at times when passion rages. Who is there left to write for when ears are deafened with political yappings and yelpings? Delicate tones of irony pass











Close on seventy, Erasmus left his house and home. An inexplicable yearning seized him to forsake Freiburg and journey to Brabant. The duke had invited him to come, but in reality another summoned him: Death. Erasmus was prey to a strange restlessness of soul. He who all his life had been a pilgrim in many lands, who had been a cosmopolitan, who had deliberately renounced his fatherland, of a sudden felt the need to tread for a last time the soil of his native country. His tired body longed to return

whence it had come; he had a premonition that the end was near.

He was destined never to reach his goal. In a tiny postchaise, the kind that was usually employed for conveying women, he drove to Basle. The old man thought to remain there only until the ice broke and then, in the springtime, to voyage down the Rhine to the land of his birth. Meanwhile, Basle put its spell upon him. Here he felt a spiritual and intellectual warmth encompassing him, here a few staunch friends lived,

Frobenius's son, Amerbach, and others. They saw to it that the invalid was made comfortable; he was housed among them. Also there was still the printing-house where he could once again see his thoughts reflected upon the printed page, where he could breathe the atmosphere of ink, where he could handle the exquisitely printed books, where he could sit in silent colloquy with the beautiful, peaceful, and informative works of the masters. In tranquil retirement, away from the





*veritatis propugnator invictissime.*" (Greeting and yet again greeting, dearest father and honour of the land which gave you birth, champion of the arts, invincible fighter for truth.) The name of the man who wrote these words, and one which was destined to outshine even the name of Erasmus, was Rabelais, who in the dawn of his youthful glory thus acclaimed the dying master whose sun was about to set. There followed yet another letter, a letter from Rome. Impatiently, Erasmus broke the seals. Then a





Free, dressed as a burgher, without decorations and mundane honours, free as are all solitaires, and alone as are all the free spirits of this world.

The truest friend of the solitary, one who never quits his side, one who is always ready to act as comforter, Dame Work, she remained with Erasmus to the last. His body tortured with sickness, lying for the most part in bed, his hand trembling with weakness and age, he wrote and wrote, day in day out, composing his commentary







breath, and then he got what he had longed that all humanity should receive—Peace.

## **Chapter 11: ERASMUS'S LEGACY**

AT the very time when Erasmus, on his deathbed, bequeathed his spiritual inheritance of European unity as the sublimest ideal to coming generations there appeared in Florence one of the most momentous books the world had ever seen. This was a famous work by





the development of power were the ultimate expression of the individual or the collective personality; for Erasmus it was justice.

Thus, for all time, the two great fundamental forms of world politics were given their intellectual shape, the practical as against the ideal, diplomacy as against ethics, State politics as against humane politics. Erasmus, the philosopher contemplating the world, held, as did Aristotle, Plato, and Thomas Aquinas, that politics should be placed in the same category as



ethics; a prince, as the leader of the State, should first of all be the servant of the divine, the exponent of the ethical ideal. Machiavelli, with the practical experience of a diplomatist, made politics an amoral and independent science, saying that it had as little to do with ethics as had astronomy and geometry. A prince, or a leader of a State, had no business to be dreaming dreams about humanity, that vague and intangible concept, but should reckon quite unsentimentally with men only as the concrete



justification of both prince and people.

In the material realm of history the principle of power has achieved a predominant position. Not so Erasmus's ideal of politics based upon conciliation and the unity of mankind. The concepts set forth in *Il Principe* have held the field, the policy of seizing every opportunity to reinforce the personal power of a sovereign has presided over the dramatic development of European history ever since that day. Generations of diplomats have drunk at the spring

tapped by the terribly keen-minded Florentine. The barriers between nations have been built of blood and iron, barriers for ever shifting and changing. Conflict instead of community of interests has made good its claim to monopolize the best energies of the European peoples. Never has Erasmus's thought taken sufficient shape and substance to exercise a tangible influence upon the moulding of European destinies. The great humanistic dream of the solution of disagreements



which does not take on material shape is not necessarily a conquered idea or a false idea; it may represent a need which, though its gratification be postponed, is and remains a need. Nay, more: an ideal which, because it has failed to secure embodiment in action, is neither worn out nor compromised in any way, continues to work as a ferment in subsequent generations, urging them to the achievement of a higher morality. Those ideals only which have failed to put on concrete form are capable of



shape and content in the soul of the masses of mankind. The humanistic ideal, that ideal grounded upon breadth of vision and clarity of mind, is destined to remain a spiritual and aristocratic dream which few mortals are capable of dreaming, but which those few inherit as a sacred legacy held in trust for others who shall come after and be handed down from one generation to the next. The idea of a future when all mankind shall work harmoniously together towards a common destiny, has never, even during the





















# THE RIGHT TO HERESY

by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

with an introduction by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

and a foreword by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

and a preface by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

and a conclusion by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

and a postscript by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

and an appendix by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

and a bibliography by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

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and a list of publishers by **WILLIAM F. BRYAN**

Future generations will  
wonder why, after so  
splendid a dawn, we were  
forced back into  
Cimmerian darkness.

—CASTELLIO, in *De arte  
dubitandi*, 1562.

## Introduction

*He who, though he falleth, is stubborn in his courage, and, being in danger of imminent death, is no whit daunted in his assurance: but, in yielding up the ghost, beholds his enemy with a scornful and fierce look—he is vanquished, not by us, but by fortune: he is slain, but not conquered. The most valiant are often the most unfortunate. So are there triumphant losses more to be envied than victories.*

—MONTAIGNE, *Of Cannibals.*



profound and distressing conviction that he was challenging a colossal antagonist, when he publicly charged Calvin with having been instigated by fanatical dogmatism in putting a man to death and thus slaughtering freedom of conscience under the Reformation.

When Castellio entered the lists in this perilous tourney, taking up his pen as a knight a lance, he was aware that a purely spiritual attack upon a dictatorship in the panoply of material armour would prove ineffectual, and that

he was, therefore, fighting for a lost cause. How could an unarmed man, a solitary, expect to vanquish Calvin, who was backed by thousands and tens of thousands, and equipped with all the powers of the State? A master of the art of organization, Calvin had been able to transform a whole city, a whole State, whose numerous burghers had hitherto been freemen, into a rigidly obedient machine; had been able to extirpate independence, and to lay an embargo on freedom of thought in favour of his own exclusive

























theological point, nor about the man Servetus; nor was it one to decide the issue between liberal and orthodox Protestantism. A question of far wider scope and a timeless question was at stake in this contest. *Nostra res agitur*. A battle was opened which, under other names and in changing forms, has perpetually to be re-fought. Theology was no more than an accidental mask, worn because theology was the mode in sixteenth-century Geneva (and elsewhere). Castellio and Calvin were the symbolical expressions



epoch, every thoughtful human being, has again and again to establish the landmarks between freedom and authority: for, in the absence of authority, liberty degenerates into licence, and chaos ensues; and authority becomes tyranny unless it be tempered by freedom. Buried deep in human nature is a mystical longing for the absorption of self into the community; and ineradicable is the conviction that it must be possible to discover some specific religious, national, or social system which will

definitively bestow peace and order upon mankind. With pitiless logic, Dostoevski's Grand Inquisitor proved that, for the most part, men are afraid of the gift of freedom; and in very truth the generality, from slackness in face of the enigmas that have to be solved and the responsibilities life imposes, crave for the mechanization of the world by a definitive and universally valid order which will save them the trouble of thinking.

This messianic yearning

for a perdurable solution of the riddle of conduct is the ferment which smoothes obstacles out of the path of prophets. When the ideals of one generation have lost their fire, their zest, their vivid tints—enough for a man (or woman) equipped with strong powers of suggestion to declare apodictically that he and he alone has discovered the new and true formulas, and myriads will confidently accept the teachings of the nth messiah. A new ideology always creates a new type of idealism, and this is doubtless the



sake, and will unresistingly follow the leader, fulfilling the Tacitean aspiration "*ruere in servitium*" so that, throughout history, the peoples, in a desire for solidarity, have voluntarily put their necks under the yoke and have kissed the hand into which they themselves have pressed the goad.

Thoughtful persons must be uplifted by the recognition that what, again and again in the story of our ancient, jejune, and mechanized world, has worked such miracles of suggestion, has ever been

















In the sixteenth century, although then as now the ideology of violence was rampant, there were free and incorruptible spirits. Letters from the humanists of those days bear witness to a profound distress at the disturbances caused by the champions of force. We are strongly moved by their detestation for the cheapjacks of dogma who cried in the marketplace: "What we teach, is true; and what we do not teach, is false." As enlightened cosmopolitans, the humanists were horrified by the inhumanity of the

“reformers.” These ran riot over the western world which had nurtured a faith in beauty, and they foamed at the mouth while proclaiming their violent orthodoxies—men such as Savonarola, Calvin, and John Knox, who wished to make an end of beauty and to transform the globe into a moral seminary. With fateful perspicacity the humanists foresaw the disasters which such rabidly self-satisfied men would bring upon Europe. Through the clamour of tongues was already audible the clash of





ventured, now and again, to shoot a few arrows out of his ambush. Rabelais, wearing fool's cap and motley, used fierce laughter as a scourge. Montaigne, a noble and wise philosopher, wrote eloquently about the matter in his *Essays*. But none of them struck shrewd blows in the endeavour to prevent the infamous persecutions and executions. Rendered cautious by experience, they said that the sage could find better occupation than attempting to control a





sharpness of their first moulding; and an avowal which tends to promote world unity will outlast disuniting, aggressive, and doctrinaire utterances. The unique courage of this forgotten worthy should serve as example to later generations, above all in the moral sphere. For when, in defiance of the theologians, Castellio styled Calvin's victim Servetus "a murdered innocent"; when, in reply to Calvin's sophisms, he thundered the imperishable utterance, "to burn a man alive does not





what Castellio ventured, knowing that in his fight for humaneness he would concentrate upon his luckless head all the inhumaneness of the cruel century in which he lived.

Sebastian Castellio had to pay the full price for his heroism, a price which emptied his energies to the dregs. This advocate of non-violence, who wished to use none but spiritual weapons, was throttled by brute force. Again and again do we see, as here, that there is scant hope of success for one who has at his command no other







with like weapons, but the ruthless bludgeoning of an unarmed man by a horde of ruffians. Calvin held sway over the printing presses, the pulpits, the professorial chairs, and the synods. Castellio's steps were dogged; eavesdroppers listened to his every word; his letters were intercepted. Can we wonder that such a briarean organization could easily get the better of the lonely humanist; that nothing but Castellio's premature death saved him from exile or the stake? The triumphant dogmatist

and his successors did not scruple to wreak vengeance on their adversary's corpse. Suspicion and base invectives, posthumously disseminated, destroyed it like quicklime, and scattered ashes over his name. The memory of the solitary who had not only resisted Calvin's dictatorship, but had inveighed against the basic principle of dictatorship over the things of the spirit, was, so the zealots hoped, to pass from the minds of men forever.

This last extremity of force was very nearly



within Calvin's sphere of influence was bold enough to publish them; and when they at length appeared it was too late for them to establish his renown as pioneer.

Others, meanwhile, had adopted his ideas. The campaign he initiated and in which he fell, was carried on in the wake of other standard-bearers.

Many are foredoomed to live in the shadows, to die in the dark—village Hampdens and mute inglorious Miltons. Those who followed in Castellio's footsteps, harvested and

garnered his fame; and in every schoolbook we may still read the error that Locke and Hume were the first advocates of toleration, the blunder being repeated and repeated as heedlessly as if Castellio's *De haereticis* had never been penned and printed. Forgotten is the author's moral courage, forgotten his campaign on behalf of Servetus, forgotten the war against Calvin ("a fly attacking an elephant"), forgotten are his writings. They are inadequately represented in the Dutch collected





impartial chronicler, to record successes, but she rarely appraises their moral worth. She keeps her eyes fixed on the victorious, and leaves the vanquished in the shadows. Carelessly these “unknown soldiers” are shovelled into the common fosse of forgetfulness. *Nulla crux, nulla corona*—neither cross nor garland—records their fruitless sacrifice. In truth, however, no effort made by the pure at heart should be deemed futile or stigmatized as barren; nor is any expenditure of moral energy dissipated into

vasty space to leave no repercussions. Though vanquished, those who lived before the time was ripe have found significance in the fulfilment of a timeless ideal; for an idea is only quickened to life in the real world through the endeavours of those who conceived it where none could witness the conception, and were ready for its sake to advance along the road to dusty death. Spiritually considered, the words "victory" and "defeat" acquire new meanings.



## Chapter 1: CALVIN'S SEIZURE OF POWER

ON Sunday, May 21, 1536, the burghers of Geneva, formally summoned by a trumpet blast, assembled in the principal square, and, raising their right hands, unanimously declared that henceforward they would live exclusively “*selon Vevangile et la parole de Dieu.*”

It was by referendum (an ultra-democratic institution which is still in vogue in Switzerland) and in the sometime episcopal

palace, that the reformed religion was thus declared to be the only valid and permitted faith in Geneva—to be the faith of the city-State. A few years had sufficed, not merely to drive the old Catholic faith from the town beside the Rhone, but to pulverize it and completely to extirpate it. Amid the menaces of the mob, the last priests, canons, monks, and nuns were expelled from the cloisters, while the churches, without exception, were purified from graven images and other tokens of



the gentle Erasmus. This “French Luther” exerted an overwhelming influence upon the masses. Small of stature, hideous, with a red beard and untidy hair, he thundered at them from the pulpit, and the fury of his violent nature aroused an emotional storm in the populace. Like Danton, a revolutionist in politics, so Farel, a revolutionist in the religious field, was able to combine the scattered and hidden instincts of the crowd, and to kindle them to a united onslaught. A hundred times before the victory, Farel had ventured

his life, threatened in the countryside with stoning, arrested and put under the ban by all the authorities; but with the primitive energy and unscrupulousness of a man dominated by one idea, he forcibly broke down resistance. Attended by a bodyguard of storm troops, he rioted into a Catholic church while the priest at the altar was celebrating mass, he forced his way into the pulpit and, amid the acclamations of his supporters, fulminated against Antichrist. He organized the street arabs





active minority can intimidate the majority by showing exceptional courage, and by readiness to use the methods of a terror—provided that the majority, however large, is slack. Though the Catholics complained of these breaches of the peace, and tried to set the Town Council to work, on the whole they sat quietly in their houses, until, in the end, the bishop handed over his see to the victorious Reformation, and ran away without striking a blow.

But now, in the way of

triumph, it became apparent that Farel was a typical uncreative revolutionist, able, by impetus and fanaticism, to overthrow the old order, but not competent to bring a new one into being. He was an adept at abuse, but devoid of formative talent; a disturber, not a constructor. He could rail against the Roman Church, could incite the dull-witted masses to hatred for monks and nuns; with sacrilegious hands, he could break the tables of the law. Having done this, he contemplated with hopeless perplexity



critical moment. In Germany, likewise, and in other parts of Switzerland than Geneva, the leaders of the Reformation were disunited, hesitant, and perplexed at the mission history had assigned them. What Luther and Zwingli had originally planned was nothing else than a purification of the existing Church, a leading back of the faithful from the authority of the pope and the councils to the forgotten evangelical doctrine. For them, the Reformation signified at the outset that the Church

was to be re-formed, that is to say, was to be bettered, purified, restored to its primitive integrity. Since, however, the Catholic Church stubbornly held to its views and would make no concession, they were faced by the need for working outside the Catholic Church instead of within—and forthwith, for when it is necessary to pass on beyond the destructive to the productive, there is a parting of the ways. Of course, there could have been nothing more logical than that the religious revolutionists, Luther,

Zwingli and the other theologians of the Reformation, should have united in brotherly fashion upon a unified creed and a unified practice for the new Church. But when have the logical and the natural swayed the course of history? Instead of a worldwide and united Protestant Church, a number of petty Churches sprang up all over the place. Wittenburg would not hear a word of the theology of Zurich. Geneva repudiated the practices of Berne. Each town wished to have a Reformation of its

own, in the Zurich, Bernese, or Genevese fashion. In every crisis, the nationalist arrogance of the European States was prophetically foreshadowed on a small scale in the arrogance of the cantonal spirit. In acrimonious disputations, in theological hair-splittings and tracts, Luther, Zwingli, Melancthon, Bucer, Karlstadt, and the rest of them, now proceeded to squander the energies which had served, so long as they held together, to undermine the gigantic





day in Geneva on his way home from Savoy. Farel hastened to call at the inn where Calvin put up, to ask the leader's advice and help as regards the work of reconstruction. For although Calvin was no more than six-and-twenty, being thus two decades younger than Farel, he already had uncontested authority. The son of an episcopal tax-gatherer and notary, born at Noyon in Picardy, educated (as Erasmus and Loyola had been) under the strict disciplines of Montagu College, being first



and conflicted with one another, Calvin, having enormous insight and being a profound logician, recognized the weighty significance of the hour. More and ever more radical theses had split away from the core of evangelical doctrine; pantheists and atheists, enthusiasts and zealots, were beginning to dechristianize and to superchristianize

Protestantism. The dreadful tragicomedy of the Anabaptists of Munster had already come to a bloody and awesome close; the Reformation was in

danger of breaking up into separate sects, and of becoming national instead of establishing itself as a universal power like its counterpart, the Roman Church. With the self-confidence of an inspired prophet, this man of twenty-five immediately realized what steps must be taken to prevent such a split in the reformed faith. The new doctrine must be spiritually crystallized in a book, a schema, a programme; the creative principles of evangelical dogma needed to be formulated. Aglow with the









law and stability. Thus arbitrariness became dogma, and freedom led to the birth of dictatorship, while spiritual ardour was rigidly shackled. Of course, whenever a revolution is bridled, it forfeits a good deal of its dynamic power. This is what happened to the Reformation in Calvin's hands; but the upshot was that thenceforward the Catholic Church as a spiritually unified and worldwide entity was contraposed by a Protestant Church occupying a similar position.



important word in what he had written; he never retraced a footstep, and never made a move in the direction of compromise with an adversary. Those who have to do with such a man must either break him or be broken by him. Half measures either for him or against him are futile. Unless you repudiate him, you must subjugate yourself to him without reserve.

Farel (and therein is shown Farel's greatness) became aware of this at the first meeting, during the first conversation. Though







problems. At length Farel lost patience at this obstinate renouncement of a call, and, with the sublime force of one of the Old Testament prophets, he thundered: “You plead the importance of your studies. In the name of Almighty God I declare unto you that His curse will light on you if you refuse your help in the Lord’s work, and seek anything else in the world than Christ.”

This emotional appeal moved Calvin and decided his career. He declared himself ready to upbuild

the new order in Geneva. What he had hitherto been sketching and drafting in words and ideas, was now to become deeds and works. Instead of stamping the form of his will upon a book, he would henceforward try to impress it upon a city and a State.

The people who know least about a historical epoch are those who live in it. Moments of supreme importance clamour vainly for their attention; and hardly ever do the decisive hours of an era receive adequate notice from its



chroniclers. Thus in the minutes of the Town Council of Geneva for the sitting of September 5, 1536, we read of Farel's proposal to appoint Calvin "*lecteur de la Sainte Escripiture*," but the minute-taker did not trouble to inscribe the name of the man who was to make Geneva famous throughout the world. The minute-secretary aridly records how Farel proposed that "*iste Gallus*"—that Frenchman—was to continue his activities as preacher. That is all. Why bother to



were men of learning. In their spare time they did not read theological works, and we cannot suppose for a moment that any one of them had even fluttered the pages of Calvin's *Institutio religionis Christianae*. Had they been scholars, they would certainly have been alarmed at the plenitude of powers assigned to "*iste Galius*" to this French preacher, within the congregation: "Here may be specified the powers with which the preachers of the Church are to be equipped. Since they are appointed as





from the outset to become lord of the city and State, they gave him office and salary and dignity. Thenceforward their own powers were at an end, for, thanks to his resistless energy, Calvin would grasp the reins, would ruthlessly realize his totalitarian ambitions, and thus transform a democratic republic into a theocratic dictatorship.

The initial steps taken by Calvin show his far-seeing logic and his clearly-thought-out aim. "When I first came into this church," he wrote



understand what they already believe and avow. They must be able to distinguish clearly between what is allowed and what is forbidden; every spiritual realm needs, no less than does every temporal realm, its visible boundaries and its laws. Within three months, Calvin submitted to this same Town Council a catechism all complete, for in its one-and-twenty articles the principles of the new evangelical doctrine were formulated in the most precise and comprehensible baldness; and this catechism, this





ever tolerate freedom in respect of doctrine or of daily life. There was not to be a jot of give and take in religious and spiritual matters; there must be no truce with individual convictions; the Church, as he regarded it, had not merely the right but the duty to impose unquestioning obedience upon all men, to impose it by force, and to punish Laodiceanism as savagely as it punished open resistance. "Others may think otherwise, but I do not myself believe our office to be confined within





hair's breadth from the demands and views of Calvin. An end had been made in the canton of what had demanded the "Christian man's freedom" to regard religion as a matter for individual conscience. The logos had gained a victory over the ethos, the law over the spirit, of the Reformation. There was to be no more liberty in Geneva, now that Calvin had entered the city. One will was to rule all.

Dictatorship is unthinkable and untenable without force. Whoever

wants to maintain power must have the instrument of power in his hands; he who wants to rule, must also have the right of inflicting punishment. Now the resolution to which Calvin owed his appointment did not give him any right to expel burghers from Geneva for ecclesiastical offences. The councillors had appointed him "*lecteur de la Sainte Escripiture*" that he might interpret Holy Writ to the faithful; they had appointed him preacher that he might preach, and might guide the

congregation to walk in the true faith. They considered that they had retained within their own hands the power of inflicting punishment, and that they, not Calvin or any preacher, were responsible for the behaviour of the burghers. Neither Luther nor Zwingli, nor any other of the reformers, had hitherto tried to take over such rights or powers, which were reserved to the civil authority. Calvin, being of an authoritarian nature, at once set to work to make the Council no more than the executive organ of his





Supper, the person thus banned would be banned also in the civic sense. Here lay the intolerable might of the new weapon. No one was permitted any longer to speak of the offender, who was, as schoolboys say, sent to Coventry, no one could sell to him or buy from him; thus what had appeared at the outset to be a purely ecclesiastical instrument placed at the disposal of the spiritual authorities, was transformed into a social and business boycott. If the person against whom a boycott was declared would

not capitulate, and refused to make public acknowledgment of wrongdoing, Calvin gave him short shrift, and commanded his banishment. An adversary of Calvin, though the most respectable of citizens, could no longer, once he had fallen into Calvin's disfavour, go on living in Geneva. One who differed openly from the preacher had his very existence as a citizen destroyed.

These fearsome powers enabled Calvin to annihilate any who ventured to resist. With







nation perceives that the temporary advantages of dictatorship, of a rigid discipline with consequent increase in combative energy, must be paid for by the forfeiture of many individual rights; and that inevitably the new law impinges upon ancient freedoms. In Geneva, as the years went by, this gradually became plain to the popular consciousness. The citizens gave their assent to the Reformation, voluntarily assembling in the market place as independent persons, to signify, by raising their

hands, that they recognized the new faith. But their republican pride revolted against the supervision exercised by catchpoles. They strongly objected to being driven through the town like convicts, and compelled to swear obedience in the Church to every edict issued by My Lord Calvin. They had not approved a rigid moral reform in order that they might find themselves threatened with outlawry and exile merely for having uplifted their hearts in song when made merry by a glass of wine, or because







In the early days of a dictatorship, before the free spirits have been clubbed into submission and other persons of independent mind have been expelled, the forces of resistance hold their own for a while, and show a considerable amount of passion. So now in Geneva, persons with republican inclinations declared that they would not allow themselves to be treated "like pickpockets." The inhabitants of whole streets, above all those of the Rue des Allemands, refused to take the oath.





real world as quickly as within their own excogitations. Calvin found it necessary to go slow until he had won the secular authorities to his support. He adopted milder ways, for his position was insecure. All the same, the newly elected Council, while keeping a sharp eye on him, was not actively hostile. During this brief respite, even his most strenuous adversaries had to recognize that the groundwork of Calvin's fanaticism was an unconditional fervour for morality; that this

impetuous man was not driven along his course by personal ambition, but by love of a great ideal. His comrade at arms, Farel, was the idol of the young people and the mob, so that tension could easily be relaxed if Calvin consented to show a little diplomatic shrewdness, and adapted his revolutionary claims to the less extreme views of the burghers in general.

But here an obstacle was encountered in Calvin's granitic nature and iron rigidity. Throughout life, nothing could be further from this thoroughpaced

zealot than a willingness for conciliation. He never understood the meaning of a middle course. For him there existed but one course—his own. All or nothing; he must have supreme authority or renounce his whole claim. Never would he compromise, being so absolutely convinced of the rightness of Jehan Calvin's standpoint that he simply could not conceive an opponent might believe in the rightness of another cause, and from a different point of view be as right as Master Calvin. It became

an axiom for the latter that his business was to teach and other people's business was to learn. With perfect sincerity and imperturbable conviction, he announced: "I have from God what I teach, and herein my conscience fortifies me." Possessing terrific and sinister self-assurance, he compared his own views with absolute truth, and said: "*Dieu m'a fait la grace de declarer ce qu'est bon et mauvais*" (God has been gracious enough to reveal unto me good and evil). Yet again and again this man, who



suffered from a sort of demoniacal possession by his own self, grew embittered and was genuinely outraged when another person with equal confidence maintained a contrary opinion. Dissent brought on in Calvin a nervous paroxysm. His mental sensibility affected the workings of his body. When he was crossed, his stomach revolted and he vomited bile. The antagonist might offer the most reasonable objections. That mattered nothing to Calvin, who was concerned only with the





alone possessed the truth. But thanks to this overweening self-confidence, thanks to this prophetic exaltation, to this superb monomania, Calvin was able to hold his own in actual life. It was to a petrified imperturbability, to an icy and inhuman rigidity, that he owed his victory on the political stage. Nothing but such an intoxication with the self, nothing but so colossally limited a self-satisfaction, makes a man a leader in the domain of universal history. People are prone to accept suggestions, not





the Lord for dogs to devour.” Another preacher declared in open church that the Town Council was “an assembly of toppers.” Thus Calvin’s adherents formed a rigid block in their defiance of authority.

The Town Council could not tolerate so provocative a revolt. At first it was content to issue an unmistakable hint to the effect that the pulpit must not be used for political purposes, since the business of those who held forth in the pulpit was simply and solely to expound the word of God.





and, since representatives of the parties began to crowd into the church sword in hand, one side determined to support the interdicted preacher, and the other side to prevent him from making himself heard, a riot ensued, so that the Easter celebrations very nearly ended in massacre.

Now the Town Council's patience was exhausted. The Great Council of the Two Hundred, the supreme authority, was summoned, and was asked to dismiss Calvin and the other preachers who defied the







formed without his stirring a finger on its behalf. It was in exile that many remarkable persons acquired an authority that is wielded only by those who have won affection and inspired confidence. Caesar in Gaul, Napoleon in Egypt, Garibaldi in South America, Lenin in the Urals, became stronger through absence than they would have been had they remained present. So was it, too, with Calvin.

Granted that, in the hour of expulsion, it seemed as if all was up with Jehan



found it difficult to shark up one or two servile preachers, who, fearing that resolute action on their part might make them unpopular, were readier to slacken the reins than to draw them tighter. With such men in the pulpit, the Reformation in Geneva, which had been so energetically undertaken by Calvin, soon came to a standstill, and the burghers were confused as to what was right and what was wrong in matters of faith, so that the members of the prohibited Catholic Church gradually regained





authorities could at length see no other course than to comply with the popular will. The first messages and letters to Calvin were no more than cautious inquiries; but soon they plainly and urgently expressed a desire for the preacher's return. The invitation was intensified into a passionate appeal. The Town Council no longer wrote to "Monsieur" Calvin asking him to come back and help the town out of its difficulties, but addressed its communications to "Maitre" Calvin. At length





to “subordinate” itself, would Calvin consider the negotiations to be on a satisfactory footing. With a disdain which he exaggerated for tactical reasons, he rejected these urgent offers. “A hundred times rather would I go to my death than resume the distressful struggles of earlier days,” he wrote to Farel. He would not move a step towards his exponents. When at length the municipal authorities, metaphorically speaking, kneeled before Calvin, beseeching him to come back, his closest friend













## Chapter 2: THE “DISCIPLINE”

ONE of the most momentous experiments of all time began when this lean and harsh man entered the Cornavin Gate. A State was to be converted into a rigid mechanism; innumerable souls, people with countless feelings and thoughts, were to be compacted into an all-embracing and unique system. This was the first attempt made in Europe to impose, in the name of an idea, a uniform

subordination upon an entire populace. With systematic thoroughness, Calvin set to work upon the realization of his plan to convert Geneva into the first Kingdom of God on Earth. It was to be a community without taint, without corruption, disorder, vice, or sin; it was to be the New Jerusalem, a centre from which the salvation of the world would radiate. This one and only idea was to embody Calvin's life; and the whole of his life was to be devoted to service of this one idea. The iron



will of God to be recognized? Where are His instructions to be found? In the gospels, answered Calvin; there, and there only. In Holy Writ, which is eternal, God's will and God's word live and breathe. These sacred writings have not been preserved for us by chance. God expressly transformed tradition into scripture, that His commandments might be plainly recognizable, and be taken to heart by men. This evangel existed before the Church and was superior to the Church; and there was

no other truth outside or beyond (“*en dehors et au delh*”). Consequently, in a truly Christian State, God’s word, “*la parole de Dieu*” was the supreme expression of morality, thought, faith, law, and life; the Bible, as a book, embodied all wisdom, all justice, all truth. For Calvin, the Bible was the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. All decisions in all matters must be based upon its texts.

By thus making the written word the supreme authority of mundane

behaviour, Calvin seemed to be repeating the well-known primal demand of the Reformation. In reality he was making a huge step beyond the Reformation, and was breaking wholly away from its original circle of ideas. For the Reformation began as a movement to secure peace in spiritual and religious matters. It purposed to lay the gospels in every man's hands without restriction. Instead of the pope in Rome and the Councils of the Church, individual conviction was to shape Christianity. This "*Freiheit*







legislator, and His preacher who was the sole authoritative interpreter of divine law, were judges in the sense of the Mosaic dispensation; were judges over the kings and over the people; were equipped with a power which it was sinful to resist. None but the interpretations of the Consistory were valid; they, and not decrees of the Town Council, were to be the bases of legislation in Geneva. They alone could decide what was allowed and what was forbidden; and woe unto him who should venture to challenge







masterfully projects from  
between sunken cheeks;  
the thin-lipped mouth  
makes a transverse slit in  
the face, a mouth which  
rarely smiles. There is no  
warm flush upon the  
wasted, ashen-hued skin. It  
seems as if fever must, like  
a vampire, have sucked the  
blood out of the cheeks, so  
grey are they and wan,  
except when, in fleeting  
seconds, under stress of  
anger, they become hectic.  
Vainly does the prophet's  
beard (and all Calvin's  
disciples and priests did  
their best to follow the  
fashion set by their master)



his private rooms. One's breath would grow cold if one were continually to feel these alert and spying eyes fixed upon one in all one's daily doings. No store of individual cheerfulness could stand up against it. Zurbaran would probably have best succeeded in portraying Calvin, in the same style of Spanish fanaticism as that in which he represented the ascetics and the anchorites, dark upon a dark background; men who dwelt in caves far from the world, forever looking at the Book, with, as other implements of









devotion to the spirit; but never for an hour did he live his own private life.

Calvin never knew what it was to enjoy youth, he was, so to say, born adult; another and fundamental characteristic was his total lack of sensuality. The latter quality was a grave danger to his doctrinal teaching. The other reformers believed and declared that man could serve the divine purpose faithfully by gratefully accepting God's gifts; essentially healthy and normal, they delighted in their health and in their





















demon of industry, working without a pause. When other houses were still fast asleep, long before dawn the lamp would already be lighted in his study; and would go on burning for hours after midnight, when all the rest of Geneva had sought repose. But to those who looked up at his window towards sun-down and sun-up, it seemed as if this lonely lamp were ever burning. The amount of work he turned out was incredible, so that we cannot but think he must have kept four or five









Daily, almost hourly, visitors arrived from foreign parts. No student, no budding theologian, could pass through Geneva without seeking Calvin's advice and paying his respects. His house was like a post office, a permanent source of information, as regards political and private affairs. With a sigh, he once wrote to a friend saying that he could not recall ever having had two consecutive hours during his official career to devote without interruption to his work.

From the most distant















what are wrongfully supposed to be pious pictures and sculptures.

Only when perfectly clear, is the truth the truth. God's word can rarely be God's word unless it is absolutely plain. Away, then, with idolatry! Throw pictures and statues out of the churches. Away with coloured vestments. Free the Lord's Table from mass-books and gilded tabernacles. God has no need of the ornate. Away with wanton junketings which numb the spirit: let no music, no sonorous organ play during divine







persons of less ascetic temperament. How incomprehensible has been God's decision, Calvin groans again and again, to create His creatures so imperfect and immoral, perpetually inclined towards vice and sin, incapable of recognizing the divine, and impatient to plunge once again in the deep waters of sin. Disgust seizes him when he contemplates his brothers in the faith. Never perhaps has a great founder of a religion used such degrading terms in his description of mankind:











devised by and imposed upon man down to our own days. From the first hour of his dictatorship, this brilliant organizer herded his flock, his congregation, within a barbed-wire entanglement of paragraphs and prohibitions, the so-called “Ordinances”; simultaneously creating a special department to supervise the working of terrorist morality. The organization of which we have just spoken was called the Consistory, its purpose being defined, ambiguously enough, as that of

supervising the congregation or the community “that God may be honoured in all purity.” Only to outward seeming was the sphere of influence of this moral inspectorate restricted to the religious life. For, owing to the intimate association of the secular or mundane with the philosophical in Calvin’s totalitarian conception of the State, the vestiges of independence were henceforward to come automatically under the control of the authorities. The catchpoles of the Consistory, the “*anciens*,”

were expressly instructed to keep watch upon the private life of every one in Geneva. Their watchfulness must never be relaxed, and they were expected to pay attention, “not only to the uttered word, but also to opinions and view.”

From the days when so universal a control of private life was instituted, private life could hardly be said to exist any longer in Geneva. With one leap, Calvin outdistanced the Catholic Inquisition, which had always waited for reports of informers or denunciations from other





prayers by heart, or as to why they had failed to attend one of Master Calvin's sermons. But with such catechizing and moralizing, the visitation was by no means at an end. The members of this moral Cheka thrust fingers into every pie. They felt the women's dresses to see whether their skirts were not too long or too short, whether these garments had superfluous frills or dangerous slits. The police carefully inspected the coiffure, to see that it did not tower too high; they counted the rings on the

victim's fingers, and looked to see how many pairs of shoes there were in the cupboard. From the bedroom they passed on to the kitchen table, to ascertain whether the prescribed diet was not being exceeded by a soup or a course of meat, or whether sweets and jams were hidden away somewhere. Then the pious policeman would continue his examination of the rest of the house. He pried into bookshelves, on the chance of there being a book devoid of the Consistory's *imprimatur*; he looked





the authorities were always on the hunt for anything that smacked of pleasure, for any “paillardise,” and woe unto a burgher caught visiting a tavern when the day’s work was over to refresh himself with a glass of wine, or unto another who was so depraved as to find pleasure in dice or cards. Day after day the hunt went on, nor could the overworked spies enjoy rest on the Sabbath. Once more they would make a house-to-house visitation where some slothful wretch was lying in bed instead of seeking edification from

Master Calvin's sermon. In the church another informer was on the watch, ready to denounce anyone who should enter the house of God too late or leave it too early. These official guardians of morality were at work everywhere indefatigably. When night fell, they pried among the bushes beside the Rhone, to see if a sinful pair might be indulging in caresses; while in the inns they scrutinized the beds and ransacked the baggage of strangers. They opened every letter which entered or left the city; and the





looked askance at his fellows. The “*zelo della paura*” the zeal of dread, ran impatiently ahead of the informers. After some years, the Consistory was able to abolish official supervision, since all the citizens had become voluntary controllers. The restless current of denunciations streamed in by day and by night, and kept the mill wheel of the spiritual Inquisition turning briskly.

Who could feel safe under such a system, could be sure that he was not breaking one of the

commandments, since Calvin forbade practically everything which might have made life joyful and worthwhile? Prohibited were theatres, amusements, popular festivals, any kind of dancing or playing. Even so innocent a sport as skating stirred Calvin's bile. The only tolerated attire was sober and almost monkish. The tailors, therefore, were forbidden, unless they had special permission from the town authorities, to cut in accordance with new fashions. Girls were forbidden to wear silk









No book might be printed without a special permit. It was forbidden to write letters abroad. Images of the saints, other sculptures, and music were forbidden. Even as regards psalm-singing, the ordinances declared that “care must be taken” to avoid allowing attention to wander to the tune, instead of concentrating it upon the spirit and the meaning of the words: for “only in the living word may God be praised.” The citizens, who before Calvin’s coming had regarded themselves as free burghers, were now





permissible. Not much. It was permissible to live and to die, to work and to obey, and to go to church. This last, indeed, was not merely permitted, but enforced under pain of severe punishment in case of absence. Woe unto the burgher who should fail to hear the sermons preached in the parish to which he belonged; two on Sunday, three in the course of the week, and the special hour of edification for children. The yoke of coercion was not lifted even on the Lord's Day, when the round of duty, duty, duty,

was inexorable. After hard toil to gain daily bread throughout the week, came the day when all service must be devoted to God. The week for labour, Sunday for church. Thus Satan would be unable to gain or keep a footing even in sinful man; and thus an end would be put to liberty and the joy of life.

But how, we ask in amazement, could a republican city, accustomed for decades to Swiss freedom, tolerate a dictatorship as rigid as had been Savonarola's in





imposed reign of terror,  
paralyses the will of the  
individual, making  
community life impossible.  
Like a consuming disease,  
it eats into the soul; and  
soon, this being the heart  
of the mystery, universal  
cowardice gives the  
dictator helpers  
everywhere; for, since each  
man knows himself to be  
under suspicion, he  
suspects his neighbours;  
and, in a panic, the zealots  
outrun the commands and  
prohibitions of their tyrant.

An organized reign of  
terror never fails to work  
miracles; and when his

authority was challenged, Calvin did not hesitate to work this miracle again and again. Few if any other despots have outdone him in this respect; and it is no excuse to say that his despotism, like all his qualities, was a logical product of his ideology. Agreed, this man of the spirit, this man of the nerves, this intellect, had a hatred of bloodshed. Being, as he himself openly admitted, unable to endure the sight of cruelty, he never attended one of the executions and burnings which were so frequent in























Two burghers played skittles: prison. Two others diced for a quarter bottle of wine: prison. A man refused to allow his son to be christened Abraham: prison. A blind fiddler played a dance: expelled from the city. Another praised Castellio's translation of the Bible: expelled from Geneva. A girl was caught skating, a widow threw herself on the grave of her husband, a burgher offered his neighbour a pinch of snuff during divine service: they were summoned before the Consistory, exhorted, and









unfailingly be held up against him in evidence.

It was inevitable that so unsleeping a terror should, in the end, banish a sense of dignity and a feeling of energy both from individuals and from the masses. When, in a State organization, every citizen has to accept that he will be questioned, examined, and condemned, since he knows that invisible spies are watching all his doings and noting all his words; when, without notice, either by day or by night, his house is liable to “visitations”—then people’s



a pall. Bright garments disappeared, colours became drab, no bells rang from the church towers, no jolly songs re-echoed in the streets, every house became as bald and unadorned as a Calvinist place of worship. The inns were empty, now that the fiddlers could no longer summon people to the dance, now that skittles could no longer be played, now that dice no longer rattled gaily on the tables. The dance-halls were empty; the dark alleys, where lovers had been wont to roam, were



might be mistaken for sensuality. They no longer knew unconstraint, being afraid of the terrible man who himself was never cheerful. Even in the privacy of family life, they learned to whisper, for beyond the doors, listening at the keyholes, might be their serving men and maids. When fear has become second nature, the terror-stricken are perpetually on the look-out for spies. The great thing was, not to be conspicuous. Not to do anything that might arouse attention, either by one's dress or by a





do flowers which have never known sufficient sunlight, but have been kept in semi-darkness.

The rhythm of the town was as regular as that of a clock, a chill tick-tack, never interrupted by festivals and fete-days—monotonous, orderly, and dependable. Any one visiting Geneva for the first time and walking through its streets, must have believed the city to be in mourning, so cold and gloomy were the inhabitants, so mute and cheerless the ways, so oppressive the spiritual



atmosphere. Discipline was wonderfully maintained; but this intolerable moderation that Calvin had forced upon Geneva had been purchased by the loss of all the sacred energies, which can never thrive except where there is excess and unrestrained freedom. Though Geneva produced a great number of pious citizens, earnest theologians, and distinguished scholars, who made the city famous for all time, still, even two centuries after Calvin, there were in this town beside the Rhone no



## Chapter 3: ENTER CASTELLIO

A DICTATOR who is feared is not necessarily loved; and those who submit to a reign of terror may be far from acknowledging its justification. No doubt, during the first months after Calvin's return to Geneva, the burghers and the civil authorities were unanimous in their admiration. All parties seemed well affected towards him. Since there was only one party, and only one supremacy, all





instead of summoning one who would effect the mental healing they desired, they had brought back within the city walls one who would lay shackles on their freedom, and one whose more and more outrageously coercive measures would, in the end, alienate even the most loyal of his adherents.

Within a few months dissatisfaction with Calvin was again rife; for his boasted “discipline” had seemed far more seductive as a wish-dream than in reality. The glamour and romance had faded, and

those who yesterday were rejoicing now began to murmur. Still, a palpable and easily understood reason is needed to shake the prestige of a dictator; nor was Calvin slow to provide one. The Genevese first began to doubt the infallibility of the Consistory during an epidemic of plague, which devastated the city from 1542 to 1545. The very preachers who had, in loud proclamation, insisted that, under pain of punishment, every sick person must within three days summon a divine to his bedside,





him “indispensable,” openly insisting “it would not do to weaken the whole Church in order to help a part of it.” The other preachers, who had not so important a mission as Calvin’s, were equally careful to keep out of danger. Vain were the appeals of the Council to these timid shepherds. A critic said frankly of the preachers: “They would rather be hanged than go to the lazaretto.” On June 5, 1543, all the preachers of the Reformed religion in Geneva, headed by Calvin, appeared at a meeting of







that, in the broad light of day, an atheist had been dragged out of bed by the devil and flung into the Rhone. For the first time in his experience, he had to endure the humiliation of noticing that many members of his congregations did not even try to hide their smiles.

Anyhow, a large part of the faith in Calvin's infallibility, the faith which is an indispensable psychological element of every dictator's power, vanished during the epidemic of plague. The enthusiasm with which his











murmur                      impotently,  
remaining potential energy  
instead      of      becoming  
kinetic. They are a mob  
against              an              army,  
unorganized      disaffection  
against organized terror,  
and therefore make no  
headway. During these first  
years, Calvin found it easy  
to hold the scattered  
groups in leash. They never  
combined              effectively  
against him, and he dealt  
with each group in  
isolation.

The chief danger to an  
ideologist who has grasped  
the reins of power is a man  
who advocates a rival



one. It shows a serious and thoughtful countenance, with candid eyes beneath a high, bold forehead. That is all the physiognomist can say. It does not grant us an insight into the depths of his character, and yet the man's most essential trait is unmistakably limned—his self-confidence and balance. If we place the portraits of Calvin and Castellio side by side, the opposition the two men were to manifest so decisively in the mental field is here plainly symbolized in the domain of the sensual. Calvin's

visage is all tension, it expresses a convulsive and morbid energy, urgently and uncontrollably seeking discharge; Castellio's face is gentle and composed. The former displays fury and fret; the latter, serenity. We see impatience versus patience; impulsive zeal versus persistent resolution; fanaticism versus humanism.

We know almost as little about Castellio's youth as we do about his likeness. He was born in 1515, six years later than Calvin, in Dauphine, the borderland









energy was being wasted in elaborating the texts of Cicero and Thucydides at a time when a religious revolution was affecting millions, and was devastating Germany like a forest fire. At the universities, there were more disputes about the old Church and the new than about Plato and Aristotle; professors and students studied the Bible instead of the Pandects. As in later times people have been engrossed by political, national or social movements, so, in the sixteenth century, all the



















New into Latin and French dialogues. Soon the little volume, which had been primarily designed as a *pons asinorum* for the youngsters of Geneva, became widely known throughout the world, and had a literary and pedagogic influence which was perhaps only equalled by that of Erasmus's *Colloquies*. For centuries the booklet was printed and reprinted, there having been no less than forty-seven editions; and through its pages hundreds of pupils learnt the elements of classical Latin.

Although, among Castellio's humanist endeavours, the manual is no more than a parergon, a chance product, still, it was thanks to this book that he became a prominent figure.

Castellio's ambition was directed towards higher aims than the writing of a convenient and useful manual for school children. He had not renounced humanism in its familiar form in order to squander his energy and learning upon such petty tasks. The young idealist had the sublime intention to repeat

and outclass the mighty deeds of Erasmus and Luther. He determined upon no less an undertaking than the translation of the entire Bible into Latin, and subsequently into French. His own people, the French, were to have the whole truth; as the humanist and German world had received the whole truth through Erasmus's and Luther's creative will. Castellio set himself to this gigantic task with characteristic tenacity and quiet confidence. Night after night he burned the











Nothing could be further from Castellio's nature than conceit or undue self-confidence. He never did what Calvin so often did—never proclaimed his opinion to be the only sound one, his outlook upon any matter to be flawless and incontestable. The preface he later wrote to this translation is a signal example of scientific and human modesty. He admitted frankly that he did not understand all the passages in Holy Writ, and therefore warned the reader against putting undue confidence in his











































light of reason, without this implying the contention that one who put forward a new interpretation was the sole possessor of the truth. Castellio could not but be outraged to notice with what overweening confidence the preachers in Geneva were expounding the word of God, as if it had been so uttered as to be intelligible to themselves alone. He was exasperated by such opinionatedness, by the cocksureness of those who were continually insisting upon the sanctity of their calling, while speaking of all others as











Consistory, challenge his opponent, document general accusations with names and with facts? Not a bit of it. Calvin was never inclined to take a straightforward course in political matters. For him, every attempt at adverse criticism represented something more than a theoretical divergence of opinion; it was also an offence against the State, it constituted a crime. Now crimes must be dealt with by the secular arm. Castellio was summoned to appear, not before the Consistory but before the

temporal authority; a moral dispute was transformed into a disciplinary procedure. His indictment, as laid before the Town Council in Geneva, ran: "Castellio has undermined the prestige of the clergy."

The Council was loth to consider this question. It had no love for quarrels among preachers. We cannot help thinking that the secular authority was uneasy about the Consistory's usurpation of power. The councillors postponed a decision for a considerable time, and

their ultimate judgment proved ambiguous. Castellio was censured without being either punished or dismissed; but his activities as preacher in Vandoeuvres were suspended until further notice.

It might be thought that so lukewarm a reprimand would suffice Castellio. But he had made up his mind otherwise. This affair merely served to confirm his previous opinion that there was no room for a free spirit in Geneva under the dictatorship of a tyrant like Calvin. He therefore

begged the Council to relieve him of his office. From this first trial of strength, and from his adversary's tactics, he had learned enough to know that political partisans deal arbitrarily with truth when they want what they call truth to serve their policy. Castellio plainly foresaw that his frank and manly rejection of office and dignity would only make his enemy spread hints that Castellio had lost his position for some sort of misconduct. Before leaving Geneva, therefore, Castellio demanded a written report

































dialogues. Not a day, not a night, passed in which Castellio did not remain hard at work. Never was he to know the delights of travel, the joys of relaxation, nor even the sensual rewards of fame and wealth. But he would rather accept the gall of unceasing poverty, would rather forfeit his chances of sleep, than be untrue to his conscience. Thus he provides us with a magnificent example of the spiritual hero, who, unseen by the world and in the darkness of oblivion, struggles on behalf of what

he regards as a holy of holies—the inviolability of his words, and his indestructible right to his own opinion.

The real duel between Castellio and Calvin had not yet begun. But two men, two ideas, had contemplated one another, and each had recognized the other to be an irreconcilable opponent. They could not have lived for an hour in the same town, in the same spiritual area; but, although they were physically separated, one being in Basle and the other in Geneva, they kept

a close watch on one another. Castellio did not forget Calvin, nor Calvin Castellio; and though they were silent about one another, it was only while waiting until the decisive word should be spoken. Such oppositions, which are something more than mere differences of opinion, being a primal feud between one philosophy and another, can never come to terms; never can spiritual freedom be at ease under the shadow of dictatorship; and never can a dictatorship be carefree



## Chapter 4: THE SERVETUS AFFAIR

FROM time to time, history seems to choose out of the millions one outstanding figure, as if to symbolize some peculiar philosophic outlook. Such a man need not be a genius of the first rank. Often destiny is satisfied to make a haphazard name conspicuous among many, which is thenceforward ineradicably impressed in the memories of our race. Thus Miguel Servetus was not a man of supreme







intellectual energy, though he was incapable of following his own lights, and nothing but the sustained endeavour to reach a goal can transform an able spirit into a creative genius.

It has become a commonplace to say that every Spaniard has some of the traits of a Don Quixote; but certainly the remark applies admirably to Miguel Servetus, the Aragonese. His physique was frail, his face pallid, with a beard trimmed to a point, so that outwardly he resembled the long, lean















day—in Strasburg, Martin Bucer and Capito; in Basle, Oecolampadius—to urge them to make short work, as far as the Evangelical Church was concerned, with the “erroneous” dogma of the Trinity. The reader can imagine the fury and disgust of these dignified and mature preachers and professors, when a Spanish greenhorn forced his way into their houses, and, with the uncontrol of a vigorous but hysterical temperament, insisted that they instantly modify their views and unhesitatingly adopt his



whole Christian religion.”

But, just as little as the knight of La Mancha was to be cured of his delusions by abuse or violence, just so little would this quixotic theologian listen to argument or accept reproof. If the leaders could not understand him, if the wise and the prudent would not listen to him in their studies, then he must carry on his campaign among the public at large. The whole Christian world should read his theses. He would publish a book. At two- and-twenty, Servetus gathered together the last

of his funds, and had his views printed at Hagenau (*De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem*, 1531). Thereupon the storm broke. Bucer did not hesitate to say that the rascal deserved "to have the guts torn out of his living body"; and throughout the Protestant world Servetus from this hour was considered to be nothing more nor less than an emissary of Satan.

It need hardly be said that one who had assumed so provocative an attitude, who had declared both Catholic and Protestant









mathematics, meteorology, astronomy, and astrology; but the physicians at the university were exasperated at this mishmash of astrology with the healing art, and they took some of his quackeries amiss. Servetus-Villanovus fell into disfavour with the authorities; and the Parlement of Paris received a complaint that he was doing much mischief with his “judicial astrology,” a science condemned both by divine and mundane laws. Once more Servetus saved himself by flight, although not before the identity of











intellectual converse. Since, in his present home, he could not venture to discuss his theological convictions with any one by word of mouth, he would discuss them secretly in writing.

The disastrous thing for Servetus was that, in his blindness, he pitched upon Calvin as a theologian worthy of his confidence; hoping that this bold and revolutionary innovator would be ready to sympathize with even bolder interpretations of Holy Writ. It may be that in approaching Calvin,











with such an incurable idiot? He rids himself of Servetus's arguments with a kick. "I care as little for this fellow's words as I care for the heehaw of a donkey (*le hin-han d'un ane*)."

The unlucky Don Quixote, instead of perceiving before it was too late against what an armour-plate of self-satisfaction he was tilting with his slender lance, returned to the charge. Calvin, who will have nothing to do with him, is the very man whom, above all others, he wants to convince. It almost seemed













struggle was inevitable; and, his mind full of gloomy anticipations, Servetus wrote at this time to a theologian: "It is now perfectly plain to me that I am doomed to suffer death in this cause, but the thought cannot shake my courage. As one of Jesus' disciples, I shall advance in the footsteps of my master."

Castellio and Servetus and a hundred others had occasion to learn that it is extremely dangerous to contradict so fanatical a dogmatist as Calvin, or to



Calvin never forgot. De la Mare, the pastor, wrote of him: “*quand il a la dent contre quelqu'un ce n'est jamais fait*” A name once inscribed upon the tablets of his memory would remain indelible until the man himself had been erased from the Book of Life. Thus it mattered not that several years would elapse during which Calvin heard no more of Servetus. Calvin continued to bear Servetus in mind. The compromising documents lay silent in the drawer where they had been put for safe keeping; arrows





appeal in the preface to his book. "O Jesu Christe, Son of God, thou which art given us from heaven, reveal thyself to thy servant, that so great a revelation may become truly clear to us. It is thy cause which I, following an inward divine urge, have undertaken to defend. In former years I made a first attempt. Now, since the times are fulfilled, I am constrained to do so anew. Thou hast instructed us not to hide our light under a bushel. Woe unto me if I fail to proclaim the truth!"

The precautions taken by







colophon, over the date, the identifying initials M.S.V. (Miguel Servetus Villanovus), thus giving the bloodhounds of the Inquisition an irrefutable proof of authorship.

Still, it was a work of supererogation for Servetus to betray himself thus, since his ruthless adversary, though apparently slumbering, was in reality kept awake by the spur of hatred. The elaborate organization for espionage which Calvin had established in Geneva—a network whose





chosen an open and honest way. It would have sufficed for him, from the pulpit, to warn Christendom against the book, and the familiars of the Inquisition would have discovered the author of this wicked work even though he lived within the shadow of the archiepiscopal palace. But the great reformer saved the papal authorities the trouble of looking for Servetus, and did so in the most perfidious way. Vainly do Calvin's apologists seek to defend him even in this; their attempts throw a most



February, 1553, to a cousin, Antoine Arneys—as fanatical a Catholic as he himself was a fanatical Protestant. In this letter Trie began by describing in general terms how effectively Protestant Geneva suppressed heretical intrigues, whereas in Catholic France these weeds were allowed to grow rankly. Then, what had opened as friendly chaff suddenly grew serious. In France, for instance, there was a heretic who ought to be burned the instant the authorities could lay hands





of contents, and a transcript of the first four pages. He concluded his letter with a lamentation concerning the sinfulness of the world.

This Genevese mine was skilfully laid to explode in the right place. Everything worked out as the informer had designed. The pious Catholic Arneys, beside himself with indignation, hurried off to show the letter to the ecclesiastical authorities of Lyons; and with equal speed the cardinal betook himself to the papal Inquisitor, Pierre Ory. The stone thus set





culprit. The ecclesiastical court, which usually began its work with the thumb-screw and the rack, left Villeneuve at large; the Inquisitor returned to Lyons, having effected nothing; and Arneys was informed that his accusation had proved unfounded. The Genevese attempt to get rid of Servetus by setting the Inquisition to work proved a failure. It is possible that the whole matter would have come to nothing had not Arneys applied to Geneva, begging his cousin Trie to supply additional

and more damnatory material concerning the aforesaid heretic.

Up to now it might seem possible to suppose, if we wish to take a lenient view, that Trie acted on his own initiative in thus lodging a charge with his Catholic cousin about an author with whom he had no personal acquaintance: and that neither he nor Calvin had dreamed that their denunciation would leak through to the papal authorities. But now, when the machine of justice had been set in motion, and when the group of zealots









purposes to rid Christendom of this foul and deadly plague." What followed seems unbelievable. After dragging God's name in to cover an inhuman manifestation of human hatred, Trie sent his cousin the most compromising material he could find: letters penned by Servetus's own hand together with portions of the manuscript of the book. Now those who were to take sharp measures against a heretic could get quickly to work.

Letters in Servetus's own

handwriting were sent. How did Trie, who had never corresponded with Servetus, get hold of such letters? There is no possibility of glossing over this matter. We must bring Calvin, who wanted to remain in the background, out into the limelight. Servetus's letters, and some pages of the manuscript work, were those sent by Servetus to Calvin; and Calvin knew perfectly well for what purpose he took them out of his drawer. He knew to whom the documents would be sent; to those









private letters to the “pope’s satellites,” that they might be used for the destruction of their author. Calvin, and Calvin alone, was responsible for Trie’s letter to Arneys (really a letter addressed to the Inquisition); Calvin alone enabled Trie to enclose the incriminatory material and to conclude his letter to Arneys with the following words: “I think I am sending you some irrefutable proofs, so that you will have no further difficulty in getting Servetus arrested and brought to trial.”





that the leader of Protestantism was so accommodating as to help Catholic Inquisitors (of all persons) to burn a heretic. Such courtesies were not usually exchanged between the notables of the respective faiths, who, throughout the globe, were accustomed to use fire and sword, the gallows and the wheel, in the attempt to destroy one another. Anyhow, after this mirthful interlude, the Inquisitors devoted themselves to their task. Servetus was arrested and stringently examined. The letters and the

fragments of manuscript supplied by Calvin furnished such overwhelming proofs, that the defendant could no longer deny the authorship of the book, or that Michel de Villeneuve and Miguel Servetus were one and the same person. His cause was lost. The faggots were piled in Vienne, and soon the flames would rage.

For the second time, however, it appeared that Calvin's hope to rid himself of his arch-enemy by summoning other arch-enemies to his aid, was premature. Either



chained to the wall. Servetus enjoyed exceptional treatment. He was allowed to go for a walk in the garden every day, that he might breathe the fresh air. On April 7th, during one of these walks, the prisoner vanished, leaving for the head-gaoler nothing but a dressing-gown and the ladder by means of which the fugitive had climbed over the garden wall. Still, the faggots were not wasted, for, instead of the living Servetus, his effigy and five packages of the *Restitutio* were burned in the market-



## Chapter 5: THE MURDER OF SERVETUS

FOR some months after his escape from prison, Servetus vanished without leaving a trace. It is unlikely that we shall ever learn what sufferings the hunted man endured until that August day when, upon a hired hack, he rode into Geneva, and put up at the Rose. Nor are we likely to find out why Servetus, prompted by an evil star (*“malis auspiciis appulsus”*), should have sought refuge in Geneva.

Was it his intention to stay one night, and continue his flight by taking boat across the lake? Did he perhaps expect to conciliate his greatest enemy at a personal interview, since correspondence was unavailing? Or, perhaps, was his journey to Geneva one of those foolish actions characteristic of individuals whose nerves are overstrained; one of the pleasurable toyings with danger not infrequent in persons whose situation is desperate? We do not know; probably we never shall know. None of the







and inconspicuously gave orders to his minions. Servetus was arrested as he left the cathedral. Within an hour the fugitive was in chains. This arrest was a breach of international law, and also of the laws of hospitality generally accepted throughout the world. Servetus was not subject to Genevese jurisdiction, unless for an offence committed in that city. He was a foreigner, a Spaniard, who had only just arrived, and who had committed no crime which could justify his seizure. His books had been written



Duc d'Enghien. In this case, as in that, the arrest was to be followed, not by a properly constituted trial, but by an illegal homicide.

Servetus was arrested and thrown into prison without any charge having been brought against him. Surely then a charge must subsequently be invented? Would it not be logical to expect that the man who had instigated the arrest—“*me auctore,*” “at my instigation,” is Calvin’s own admission—should himself come forward as Servetus’s accuser? But the laws of

Geneva were exemplary, and gave little encouragement to informers. They prescribed that any burgher who accused another of a crime should himself be arrested, and should be kept in prison until he had justified his accusation. Calvin, therefore, if he accused Servetus, would have to place himself at the disposal of the court. The theocratic dictator of Geneva did not relish the prospect. He would be in an unfortunate position if the Town Council were to declare Servetus not guilty,

and if he himself were to remain under arrest for having brought an unjustifiable charge. What a blow that would be to his prestige, and what a triumph for his adversary. Calvin, diplomatic as ever, assigned to his secretary—or cook—Nicolaus de la Fontaine, the thankless task of accuser. The worthy Nicolaus went quietly to prison instead of his master, after he had handed the authorities an indictment consisting of twenty-three points (a document compiled, of course, by Calvin). Such



erroneous, for the attack had opened on Calvin's side, and all that he, Servetus, had done was to reply that Calvin was not infallible. If Calvin accused him of obstinately sticking to certain theses, he could rejoin that Calvin was no less stubborn. All that was at odds between Calvin and himself was a difference of opinion about certain theological matters, with which a secular court had no concern; and if Calvin had nevertheless arrested him, this had been the outcome of spite. The leader of Protestantism had













eloquence, his eagerness for discussion, made Servetus suspect to his judges. More and more they inclined to Calvin's view, that this foreigner, who, with gleaming eyes and clenched fists, railed against the doctrines of their Church, must be a dangerous disturber of the spiritual peace, and was probably an incurable heretic. Anyhow it was a good thing that he was being subjected to thorough examination. The court decided that he should remain under arrest, while his accuser,



others in a different way from that which he advocated, such a detestation being instinctive in a man of his tyrannical disposition. So here, if he was particularly enraged against Servetus and wished to take extreme measures at this particular moment, his motives were not private but political. The rebel against his authority, this Miguel Servetus, was to be the scapegoat for another opponent of Calvin's orthodoxy, the sometime Dominican monk, Hieronymus Bolsec, whom













Calvin was refused his victim, and had to content himself with the municipal authority's decree that Bolsec should leave the town.

Nothing but a new and successful charge of heresy could make people forget that Calvin's theological supremacy had been successfully impugned. A victory over Servetus must compensate the dictator for his failure to make an end of Bolsec; and against Servetus the chances of success were enormously more favourable. Servetus was a foreigner. He had









to be a symbol, not a man. The French emissary, therefore, was sent back unsatisfied. The Protestant dictator intended to have the trial carried through under his own jurisdiction, that all and sundry might be convinced how disastrous it was to contradict Maitre Calvin.

Calvin's friends in Geneva, as well as his enemies, were not slow to realize that the Servetus case was nothing more than a test of the dictator's power. Naturally, therefore, friends as well as



prisoner urging the latter to stiffen his resistance could not fail to work mischief. All that interested them was to make the trial as sensational as possible. The more Servetus defended himself, the more rabid his onslaught on Calvin, the better.

Really, alas, there was no need to incite Servetus to fill the cup of his heedlessness. The hardships of his long imprisonment inflamed the wrath of a man already prone to neurotic frenzy, since, as Calvin could not











relating to the most private affairs of his sexual life, angered and tormented, should lose his self-control, and answer the outrageous queries with invectives, should rail coarsely against his accuser? Servetus was wearied beyond endurance by sleepless nights. Now the man to whom he owed so much inhuman treatment had to listen to a volley of abuse.

“Do you deny that you are an assassin? I will prove it by your actions. As regards myself, I confide in the justice of my cause and am not afraid of death. But you

scream like a blind man in the desert, because the passion for vengeance burns in your heart. You lied, you lied, ignorant calumniator that you are. Wrath boils up within you when you are hounding any one to death. Would that all your magic were still hidden away within your mother's womb, so that I could have a chance to recount your errors."

In this outburst of wrath, the unhappy Servetus forgot the powerlessness of his position. His chains clanking, foaming at the mouth, he demanded of the









disturber of the theological peace, and that since the days of Zwingli and Bucer, the “impudent Spaniard” had been loathed throughout Protestant Europe. The result was that the Swiss synods unanimously pronounced Servetus’s views to be erroneous and wicked. Even though not one of the four religious communities frankly demanded or even approved capital punishment, they nevertheless endorsed on principle any severe measures that might be taken.







synods had been sent in, to try to avert the doom. Perrin and other republicans proposed an appeal to the Council of Two Hundred, the supreme authority. But it was too late; even Calvin's opponents felt it would be perilous to resist. On October 26th, by a majority vote of the Small Council sitting as High Court of Criminal Justice, Servetus was sentenced to be burned alive, this cruel verdict to take effect next day on the plateau of Champel.

Week after week,











Calvin.

The only report of Calvin's visit is Calvin's own. Dead men tell no tales. Calvin's report of Calvin's behaviour admirably discloses Calvin's rigidity and harshness. The triumphant dictator came down into the victim's cold, dank, and dark cell, not to offer consolation, not to say a brotherly or Christian word of kindness to him who was about to die in torment. Quietly, in the most matter of fact way, Calvin opened the conversation by asking why Servetus had













his victim without a syllable and without a friendly glance. Here are the words with which this fanatical accuser closes his report, words which condemn him for all eternity: “Since I could achieve nothing by argument and warning, I did not wish to be wiser than my Master. I followed the rule laid down by St. Paul, and withdrew from the heretic who had passed judgment on himself.”

Death at the stake by roasting with a slow fire is the most agonizing of all modes of execution. Even



afterwards, to shuffle off the responsibility for the exceptional cruelty of Servetus's execution. He and the other members of the Consistory, so he tells us years after Servetus's body had been reduced to ashes, tried to secure that the sentence of death by slow fire should be commuted into the milder one of death by the sword. Their labours had been vain. (*"Genus mortis conati sumus mutare, sed frustra."*) In the minutes of the Council, we cannot find a word about such frustrated endeavours; and









to Calvin for all time the stigma of utter barbarism. Servetus bluntly refused to comply, rallying his forces to endure his awful fate.

The rest is a tale of horror. On October 27th, at eleven in the morning, the prisoner was brought out of prison in his befouled rags. He was looking his last, with blinking eyes, at the light of day. His beard tangled, his visage dirty and wasted, his chains rattling, he tottered as he walked, and his ashen tint was ghastly on that clear autumn day. in front of the

steps of the Town Hall, the officers of the law, having hustled him along (since weeks of inaction had almost robbed him of the power of walking), thrust him on to his knees. With lowered head, he listened to the sentence, which a syndic now read aloud to the assembled populace. It ended with the words: "We condemn thee, Miguel Servetus, to be conveyed in bonds to Champel, there to be burned alive, and with thee the manuscript of thy book and the printed volume, until thy body is consumed to ashes. Thus











not to leave you before you should draw your last breath.” Servetus made no further reply. He was nauseated by the executioners and the disputatious theologians, and would not vouchsafe them another word. Unceasingly this alleged heretic and atheist murmured, as if for his own comfort: “O God, save my soul, O Jesus, Son of the Eternal God, have pity on me.” Then uplifting his voice, he begged all present to pray with him and for him. On reaching the place of execution, within sight



Meanwhile the loathsome preparations were begun. The wood was piled round the stake to which the clanking chains had been nailed. The executioner bound the victim's hands. Then Farel, for the last time, pressed nearer to Servetus, who was only sighing, "O God, my God," and shouted fiercely: "Have you nothing more to say?" The contentious pastor still hoped that the sight of the post where he was to endure martyrdom would convince Servetus that the Calvinist faith was the only true one. But Servetus

answered: "What else can I do than call on God?"

The disappointed Farel quitted his victim. Now it only remained for the other executioner, the official one, to perform his hateful task. The chains attached to the stake were wound four or five times around it and around the poor wretch's wasted body. Between this and the chains, the executioner's assistants then inserted the book and the manuscript which Servetus had sent to Calvin under seal to ask Calvin's fraternal opinion upon it. Finally, in scorn,

there was pressed upon the martyr's brow a crown of leaves impregnated with sulphur. The preliminaries were over. The executioner kindled the faggots and the murder began.

When the flames rose around him, Servetus uttered so dreadful a cry that many of the onlookers turned their eyes away from the pitiful sight. Soon the smoke interposed a veil in front of the writhing body, but the yells of agony grew louder and louder, until at length came an imploring scream: "Jesus, Son of the everlasting God,











## Chapter 6: MANIFESTO ON BEHALF OF TOLERATION

*To seek truth and to utter  
what one believes to be  
true, can never be a crime.  
No one must be forced to  
accept a conviction.  
Conviction is free.*

**—SEBASTIAN CASTELLIO,  
1551.**

IT was immediately  
recognized that the  
burning of Servetus had  
brought the Reformation to  
and beyond a parting of the  
ways. In a century  
disfigured by innumerable























Montaigne was of that time, and so was Castellio. It was not the blindness and folly of his day which sent Servetus to the stake, but the personal despotism of Calvin. Unfaith and superstition may be expressions of an era; but for a particular misdemeanour, he alone is responsible who commits the offence.

Indignation grew rapidly from the first hour after Servetus's martyrdom, and even de Beze, Calvin's official apologist, had to admit: "The ashes of the unhappy man were not yet



follows: “The Church thanks you, and will thank you in days to come. The Genevese officials acted rightly when they condemned this blasphemer to death.” There was even to be found a scholar and zealot named Musculus to compose a paeon on the occasion—perpetual “*trahison des clercs*.” But these were the only voices of hearty approval. Zurich, Schaffhausen, and the other synods were far less enthusiastic than Geneva had hoped. Although, on principle, they may have



thought it well that “over-zealous” sectarians should be intimidated, they were unquestionably glad that the first Protestant “act of faith,” the first destruction of a Nonconformist, had not taken place within their own walls, and that Jehan Calvin would have to bear the odium of this terrible decision.

But if these co-religionists did no more than damn with faint praise, adverse voices speedily made themselves heard. The most distinguished jurist of the day, Francois Baudouin, uttered a





















out of whole cloth. Castellio contemptuously marshals the facts. "The first of your 'exhortations' was nothing but invective; the second was, to commit Servetus to prison, where the Spaniard was not to leave until on his way to the stake where he was burned alive."

While thus with one hand he waved away his personal responsibility for the martyrdom of Servetus, with the other hand Calvin produced the best evidence he could to exculpate "the authorities." As usual, he grew eloquent when he had to justify suppression. It





Protestants from the Catholics. The real question at issue was whether the powerful possess the right to kill persons who hold other views than their own. In the case of Servetus, Calvin asserted this right from the outset, and his business now was to justify his action. Naturally he sought justification in the Bible, endeavouring to show that he had acted in accordance with the terms of a “higher commission,” in obedience to a “divine command.” That higher commission, that divine command, was











differed from him upon the minutest article of doctrine and held another opinion than that of the Consistory. Lest anyone should repudiate so barbarous a contention, Calvin turned to his last and favourite argument, that of the Terror. He declared that anyone who should defend or accuse a heretic was himself guilty of heresy and marked for punishment. Since he could not endure contradiction, Calvin proposed to intimidate those who might be moved to contradict him, threatening the offenders

with the fate which had befallen Servetus. To the stake with them if they would not hold their tongues. Calvin wished to be free once for all from being worried about this vexatious question of the murder of Servetus. The incident must be closed.

But the accusing voice of the slain could not be silenced however shrilly and furiously Calvin might rage, yelling exculpations to the world. The Calvinist apologia, with its clamours to the faithful to undertake a heresy hunt, made a most unfavourable impression.



those who would fain limit as far as possible the right to inflict capital punishment on account of differences in matters of faith; only excepting those whose error is deliberate and voluntary. What determines my judgment in these matters is, not those passages of Holy Writ which can be quoted against the use of force, but the example of the way in which, here in Berne, the Anabaptists have been mishandled. I myself saw a woman of eighty dragged to the scaffold, together with her daughter, a

mother of six children, these two women having committed no other offence than to repudiate infant baptism. In the light of such an example, I dread lest the legal authorities might not be restrained within the limits you yourself would like to establish, and lest they might be inclined to treat petty offences as great crimes. I therefore deem it advisable that the authorities should be unduly clement and considerate instead of being over-ready to appeal to the sword. I would

rather shed my own blood than be stained with the blood of a man who had done nothing to deserve punishment by death.”

These are the words of a minor municipal officer in a fanatical epoch. Many shared his views while thinking it inexpedient to utter them. Even the worthy Zerchintes was as little inclined as his master, Erasmus of Rotterdam, had been to take a definite side in current disputes. Shamefacedly he informed Calvin that he did not intend to make a public protest. “I shall not step











whether it be earthly or divine; nor was it by chance that one of his most important works (penned in 1562, but only now in the press) received the momentous title *De arte dubitandi*, “Concerning the Art of Doubting.” Castellio’s unceasing self-examination was far from making him a sceptic; his caution rendered him considerate towards other opinions than his own; and he would rather be silent than prematurely take a hand in a quarrel in which he had neither lot nor part. After having, for the sake of



















established by Calvin, Castellio and his adherents dared not promulgate their views openly. A manifesto on behalf of toleration, an appeal to our common humanity such as they planned, would be frustrated on the very first day by the embargo of the spiritual dictatorship.

Force, therefore, had to be met with cunning. A name was expressly coined. "Martinus Bellius" was announced as author of a new work; and on the title page of what was really Castellio's book, there appeared a false name as



heretics, whether they should be persecuted, and what is to be done about them, illustrated by the opinions of many learned authors both old and new.” Indeed, one who should merely flutter the pages of *De haereticis*, might well believe it to be nothing more than a pious theoretical tract, for here he would find the opinions of the most noted Fathers of the Church, those of St. Augustine, St. Chrysostom, and St. Jerome, imprinted peacefully side by side with selections from the writings of such great



Protestant authorities as Luther and Sebastian Franck, or those of non-partisan humanists like Erasmus. Here, surely, was nothing but a scholastic anthology, a juristic and theological assemblage of quotations from divers philosophers, compiled in order to help the reader to form an unbiased opinion concerning this difficult problem. But a closer examination shows that no opinions are quoted other than those which declare the passing of death-sentences upon heretics to be improper. The cunning,



“It is unchristian to use arms against those who have been expelled from the Church, and to deny them rights common to all mankind.”

But what gives a book its value is that which it openly expresses, and not the meaning that is hidden away out of sight. In the dedication to the Duke of Wurtemberg, Castellio puts the dots on the i's, and the crosses on the t's. It is the opening and closing words of this dedication which lift the theological anthology above the level of a fugitive polemic. Though the

dedication to the duke occupies little more than a dozen pages, they were the first pages in which it was claimed that freedom of thought had a sacred right of asylum in Europe. Although written only in favour of heretics, the dedication constitutes an animated defence of all those who, in later days, were to be persecuted by other dictators because they demanded political or philosophical independence. The struggle against the hereditary enemy of spiritual justice, against the narrowness of

the fanatics who wish to suppress opinions running counter to those of their own party, was here definitively opened. That restrictive notion was victoriously confronted by the idea whose spread is the only way of liquidating hostilities on earth — the idea of toleration.

Castellio developed his thesis with dispassionate logic, lucidly and irrefutably. The question at issue was whether heretics should be persecuted, and punished with death for what was a purely intellectual offence. But

before discussing this, Castellio inquires: "What do we really mean by the term heretic?" Whom are we entitled to call a heretic, without being unjust? Castellio's answer runs: "I do not believe that all those who are termed heretics, are really heretics. . . . The appellation has to-day become so abusive, so terrifying, carries with it such an atmosphere of opprobrium, that whenever a man wishes to rid himself of a private enemy, he finds that the most convenient way is to accuse this foe of heresy. As soon as others









orthodoxy, a unified doctrine, had to come into existence for the word “heretic” to gain currency; no one could rebel against a Church until that Church became an institution. True, in the Bible we find references to unbelievers and the need for their punishment. But it does not follow that one who is called a heretic is therefore an unbeliever. The case of Servetus furnished proof of this. Those who had been styled heretics, above all the Anabaptists, maintained that they were true and genuine

Christians, and honoured the Saviour as their most sublime and beloved exemplar. Since no Christian ever called a Turk, a Jew, or a heathen a “heretic,” heresy must be a crime committed wholly within the Christian fold. Thus we derive a new formulation. Heretics are persons who, although they are Christians, do not profess “true” Christianity, but stubbornly deviate in one way or another from the “right” path.

Have we now found our definition? Alas, how are we to decide which, among

the multifarious interpretations, is “true” Christianity, or which is the “right” interpretation of the word of God? Do we find it in the Catholic, the Lutheran, the Zwinglian, the Anabaptist, the Hussite, or the Calvinist exegesis? Is there such a thing as absolute certainty in religious matters, and is it always possible to achieve a “sound” interpretation of Holy Writ? Castellio was bold enough, in defiance of the self-confident Calvin, to answer with a modest No. The meaning of Holy Writ











almost commonplace, so obvious is it. But to say as much frankly, demanded immense moral courage in those days. For the significance of this formulation was that a whole era, its leaders, princes and priests, Catholics and Lutherans alike, were flatly told that their heresy-hunting was absurd, and the outcome of an illusion. Thousands and tens of thousands had been persecuted and put to death, hanged, drowned, or burned, illegally; they were innocent, for they had not committed any crime



body, whereas, as far as the soul was concerned, God did not wish any mundane law to prevail. The State is entitled to insist that every subject shall comply with the dictates of external and political order. Consequently, any authoritative interference in the internal world of moral, religious, and (let me add) artistic convictions, so long as these do not involve manifest rebellion against the essence of the State (in modern terminology, so long as they do not involve political agitation) signifies

an abuse of power, and an invasion of the inviolable rights of the individual. For what happens in this inner world, no one is responsible to the State, seeing that “with regard to these matters everyone can make a personal appeal to God.” The State authority has no concern with matters of opinion. Why, then, should people foam at the mouth when they come across someone whose philosophical convictions differ from their own; why this instant call for the police; why this murderous hatred? In











Only one thing can save mankind from such barbarism—toleration. Our world has room for many truths, which, if people had goodwill, could abide harmoniously together. “Let us be tolerant towards one another, and let no one condemn another’s belief.” Heresy hunts are needless, as is any sort of persecution of opinion. Whereas Calvin, in his exculpation, had adjured princes to use fire and sword for the unsparing extirpation of heresy, Castellio implores the potentates to “incline,

rather, to the side of clemency, and never yield to those who incite you to murder, for they will not stand beside you as helpers when you are called to your last account; they will have enough to do in order to defend themselves. Believe me, if Christ were here on earth today, He would never advise you to kill those who call on His name, even though they may err upon some detail, or may deviate from the right path.”

Dispassionately, as is proper when intellectual





but through the inward service of the heart.” Doctrinaires talked to one another as to schoolboys and slaves; but the humanists addressed one another as brother to brother, as man to man.

Nevertheless, a truly humane man could not but be strongly moved by the sight of inhuman deeds. The hand of an honest writer could not calmly go on penning statements of principle when his mind was profoundly disturbed by the illusions of his time; his voice could not but tremble when his nerves

vibrated in just indignation. Thus, in the long run, Castellio could not restrain himself, or confine himself to academic inquiries concerning the martyrdom at Champel, where an innocent man was put to death amid unspeakable tortures, a scholar destroyed by a scholar, a theologian by a theologian, in the name of the religion of love.

The image of the tortured Servetus, the mass-persecutions of heretics, made Castellio raise his eyes from the written page

to seek those who were inciting to such cruelties, those who were fruitlessly trying to excuse their intolerance on the ground that they were pious servants of God. Calvin is fiercely envisaged when Castellio exclaims: "However horrible these things may be, the sinners sin yet more horribly when they endeavour to wrap up their misdeeds in the raiment of Christ, and declare that they act in accordance with His will." Castellio knows that persons in authority always endeavour to justify their







This admirably humane man therefore feels it is time to dispel the illusion that persons are martyred and murdered merely because, on the intellectual plane, they differ from the potentates of the hour. And since he sees that potentates always misuse their powers, and since he himself, alone, a weakling, is the only person on earth to espouse the cause of the persecuted and the hunted, he despairingly raises his voice and ends his appeal in an ecstatic fugue of compassion.

“O Creator and king of







page, his name would remain imperishable in the history of mankind. For how solitary was his voice; how little hope could he have that his adjuration would find hearers in a world where the clash of arms dulled the sound of words and where war was the last appeal. Still, though they have been promulgated again and again by religious teachers and by sages, the most humane demands of forgetful mankind must be restored to memory. "Doubtless I say nothing," adds the modest Castellio,







## Chapter 7: CONSCIENCE AGAINST VIOLENCE

PERSONS who are ruthless in the attempt to suppress the opinions of others, are extremely sensitive to contradiction. Thus Calvin regarded it as monstrously unjust when the world at large ventured to discuss Servetus's execution, instead of enthusiastically accepting it without other comment than that it was a pious action most pleasing in the sight of Almighty God. With perfect seriousness





The first thought of any one of dictatorial temperament, is to suppress or to gag opinions differing from his own. On hearing from Basle, Calvin seated himself at his writing-desk, and, without having read the book *De haereticis*, he exhorted the Swiss synods to prohibit its circulation. Above all, there must be no more discussion. Geneva had spoken, "*Geneva locuta est*"; whatever other persons might wish to contribute to the story of Servetus must, on general principle, be stigmatized as



blasphemies are not to be regarded as unpunishable offences.” Quick, quick, a gag for these advocates of toleration! “May it please God that the pastors of our Church, even though somewhat late in the day, shall see to it that this mischief shall not spread.” One appeal did not suffice him. Next day, his second self, Theodore de Beze, wrote even more urgently: “You will find on the title-page the name of Magdeburg as the place of publication, but to my way of thinking this Magdeburg must be on the banks of the







winds of heaven ; a peculiarly dangerous heresy, “Bellianism.” The name was henceforward and for a considerable time given to the doctrine of toleration in matters of belief, the word being coined from the name of the reputed author of the book *Martinus Bellius*, alias *Castellio*. “We must stamp out this burst of hell-fire before it spreads over the surface of the earth.” Frenzied with wrath, de Beze wrote about the first public demand for toleration: “Since the earliest days of



rejoinder. Since Calvin had not come off very well in a recent attempt, he preferred to remain discreetly in the background, and confided the theological spurs to one of his younger disciples, Theodore de Beze, who was to earn the dictator's thanks by an overwhelmingly vigorous onslaught upon the "devilish" doctrine of toleration.

Theodore de Beze, in general a pious and just man, who, as a reward for many years of faithful









of his compassion, had raised his voice to a merciful God, praying that an end should at length be put to this bestial slaughter. Now the Genevese pastor, inspired with hatred no less earnest than had been Castellio's compassion, beseeches this same God to permit the massacre to continue without pause, "and that the Christian princes shall be vouchsafed enough magnanimity and firmness to extirpate the whole rout of evildoers." But even such an extirpation is not enough for the

















the accusation of Jehan Calvin for a murder in the name of religion, committed on Miguel Servetus at Champel. This public accusation, *Contra libellum Calvini*, although primarily directed against an individual, proved, through its moral energy, one of the most splendid polemics ever penned against attempts to overpower the word by the law, opinion by dogma, and eternally free conscience by eternally contemptible force.

For years and years















should never burn either an author or his books. The book I am attacking is open to everyone, obtainable by everyone, in either of two editions, one Latin and the other French. To avoid the possibility of objection, I shall, in the case of every citation, put the number of the paragraph from which it is taken, while my answer to each passage will bear the same number as the original.”

A discussion cannot be opened more frankly. In the aforesaid book, Calvin had unambiguously expounded his views; and







Castellio goes on to ask the question: “What really was Miguel Servetus’s offence? How could Jehan Calvin, who held no political office but only an ecclesiastical one, submit this purely theological affair to the municipal authorities? Had the municipal authorities of Geneva any right to sentence Servetus on account of the alleged crime? Finally, upon what authority, and in accordance with what law or statute, was this foreign theologian put to death in Geneva?”

As regards the first question, Castellio examines the minutes and Calvin's own utterances, in order to ascertain with what crime Miguel Servetus was charged. The only accusation Castellio can find is that Servetus "has impudently distorted the evangel, being driven thereto by an inexplicable longing for novelties." Thus the sole charge Calvin brings against Servetus is that the Spaniard interpreted the Bible independently and arbitrarily, leading him (Servetus) to other









truth, and every opinion other than ours is erroneous.” All truths, and especially religious truths, are contestable and ambiguous. “It is presumptuous to decide with so much positiveness concerning mysteries which are understood by God alone, and to behave as if we were party to His most hidden designs. And it is no less arrogant to fancy we can attain certainty about such matters and can represent them clearly to our imagination, when in reality we know nothing at





























had Servetus put to death, he now wishes to execute in like manner all who differ from himself. He, the lawmaker, repudiates his own law, and demands the death penalty for dissentients. . . . Can we be surprised that Calvin wants to bring others down to death when he is afraid that they will disclose his instability and his mutations, thrusting these into the limelight? Those who act wrongly dread the clear light of day.”

But clear light is what Castellio wants. He insists that it is incumbent upon

Calvin to explain to the world why a sometime advocate of freedom of thought should have had Servetus burned alive at Champel. Inexorably, therefore, the trial is resumed. . . .

Two questions have been settled. Dispassionate study of the facts has shown that Miguel Servetus's offence, if any, was committed on a purely spiritual plane; and, further, that the Spaniard's deviation from what Calvin regarded as a valid interpretation ought never



sword? Tell me, why did you get yourself backed up by the civil authorities?”

A State has no jurisdiction in matters of conscience. The Town Council has nothing to do with the defence of theological doctrines which are exclusively the concern of scholars. The business of the Town Council is to protect a scholar just as it protects a craftsman, a journeyman, a physician, or any other citizen to whom wrong has been done. Only if Servetus had tried to murder Calvin should the Town Council







apologia, declared that the whole body of Christian doctrine would perish unless those whose mission it was to safeguard it, had courage enough to amputate a gangrenous limb. To which Castellio replied: "The severance of unbelievers from the Church is the concern of priests, who are entitled to excommunicate heretics and to expel them from the congregation, but not to put them to death." Nowhere in the gospels, nor yet in any moral treatise ever given to the world, was such













convictions is an innocent victim. Coercion in spiritual matters is not only a crime against the spirit, but also labour lost. “We must constrain no one, for coercion has never made any one better. Those who try to coerce persons into accepting a faith behave as foolishly as one who, with a stick, should thrust food into a sick man’s mouth.” An end, therefore, to the suppression of those who hold dissentient opinions. “Let your officers at length be deprived of authority to use force or to persecute. Give to every man the right





thrust this responsibility upon the municipal authorities. "Influenced by your testimony and by that of your accomplices, the Town Council put a man to death. But the Town Council was as incompetent to act or to distinguish in such a matter as a blind man is to distinguish colours." Calvin is guilty twice over, guilty both of instigating and of executing the abominable deed. No matter what were the motives which led him to thrust the unhappy Servetus into the flames, his action was monstrous.

“You had Servetus executed, either because he thought what he said, or because, in accordance with his inward conviction, he said what he thought. If you slew him because he gave expression to his inward conviction, you killed him for speaking the truth, for even if what a man utters be erroneous, yet it is true if he only utters what he believes to be true. If, on the other hand, you had him put to death simply because his views were erroneous, then it was your duty to try, before taking such extreme













already raging in the days of Daniel. Since the prophet's enemies could find nothing assailable in his behaviour, they put their heads together in order to attack him through his convictions. The same thing is happening to-day. When people cannot discover anything to complain of in their enemy's conduct, they take up the cudgels against his 'doctrine'; and this is extremely adroit, seeing that the authorities, who have no opinion of their own, are all the easier to persuade. Thus the weak



## Chapter 8: VIOLENCE DISPOSES OF CONSCIENCE

SELDOM has a spiritual despot been attacked more vigorously and perhaps never with so fulminant a passion than was Calvin in Castellio's *Contra libellum Calvini*. Its essential truth and its clarity would, one might have imagined, teach even the most indifferent that freedom of thought under Protestantism and therefore the general freedom of European thinkers would be lost if they did not instantly rebel



















but give you a temporal, not a spiritual dominance; a dominance based upon coercion, and not upon the love of God. Nor do I envy you your power and your weapons. I have other powers and other weapons—an imperturbable conviction of innocence, and trust in Him who will help me and give me grace. Even if, for a season, truth is suppressed by the blind 'justice' of this world, no one can permanently coerce truth. Let us cease to heed the judgment of a world which slew Christ: let us ignore an assize





















to break his discreet silence. He had grown weary of open quarrel. Humanists of the Erasmian type are rarely persistent fighters. The customary methods of the partisan, with his unceasing hunt for proselytes, seem to them unworthy of an intelligent man. Having testified to the truth, they feel that it would be a work of supererogation to reiterate their protest. They are rarely propagandists. In the Servetus affair, Castellio had said his say; he had done his best to defend the memory of the





length appointed him professor; and he had nearly finished what he regarded as his most important task in life, the translation of the Bible into Latin and French. During the years 1555 and 1556, he desisted from polemic writing.

But Calvin and the Genevese were informed by spies that, within the immediate circle of his friends at the university, he continued to promulgate humanist views. Though his hands were tied, he was still free to speak; and the crusaders of intolerance







translation of the Bible; he was denounced as the author of anonymous libels; the most abominable calumnies were disseminated: as if at the word of command, a storm was raised against him from every quarter of the compass.

The ubiquity and the excesses of the zealots made it clear to all unbiased humanists that an attempt was to be made upon the body and the life of this distinguished and pious scholar, now that he had been deprived of freedom of speech. The



















Beze. He was no longer concerned with right or wrong, with Holy Writ and its interpretation, with truth or falsehood, but only with the speedy destruction of Castellio. Yet, at the moment, he could think of no adequate reason for attacking Castellio, who had retired from controversy to resume his learned labours. Since there was no warrant, one must be manufactured, haphazard, at all risks. Any cudgel would do with which to batter the detested Castellio. Calvin seized as his excuse an











part render him base. A distinguished calm breathes through the opening periods. "Not with enthusiasm do I enter this path of public discussion. I should have greatly preferred to come to a brotherly understanding with you, in the spirit of Christ, and not to adopt this boorish method of mutual accusations, which cannot fail to injure the prestige of our Church. But since you and your friends have frustrated my dream of peaceful collaboration, it seems to me incompatible with my duty as a Christian

to abstain from answering your passionate onslaught, with all due moderation.” Castellio went on to expose the crookedness of Calvin’s methods, for Calvin, in the first edition of the *Calumniae*, publicly asserted that Castellio was the author of the aforesaid anonymous pamphlet; but in his second edition, the Genevese dictator, having been by that time doubtless convinced of error, withdrew the charge, letting the matter go by default, without any frank admission that he had accused Castellio unjustly.



to be printed in Paris. If its diffusion was a criminal offence, the crime was yours, for it was through you that the writing first became widely known."

Having shown how threadbare had been Calvin's pretext for attacking him, Castellio turned to pillory the unpolished form of the invective. "You have an ample store of abusive terms at your command, and, speaking out of the fulness of your heart, you have let your tongue run away with you. In your Latin libellus you call me,







their master. But these invectives do not touch me in the least. . . . Someday truth will prevail, and you, Calvin, will have to account to God for the abuse you have showered on one to save whom, as to save yourself, Christ died. Is it possible that you are not ashamed, that you cannot remember Jesus's own words: 'Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment, and whoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council'?" Serenely, now, uplifted by a





accusation, Castellio went on to explain upon what a slender foundation the charge had been built up. Like hundreds of others, during a freshet in the Rhine, he had with a grappling-hook hauled driftwood out of the river. This was permissible, for not only was driftwood treasure - trove to anyone, but the citizens of Basle were, by the town authorities, especially invited to retrieve it, since, when the river was in flood, floating logs were a peril to the bridges. Castellio was in a position to prove that



political enemy out of the way, had tampered with the truth just as he had done in the Servetus affair. Castellio's character was unspotted. "Let those judge who please to do so," he wrote to Calvin. "I fear no man's opinion, if he judge without bias or hatred. Those who have known me since childhood know that I have always lived in needy circumstances, as numberless persons can testify. Must I call witnesses? Do you not yourself know what my life has been? Your own pupils have had ample









maintain his right to have his own opinion, and the positive-minded authoritarian who can never rest till all the world has said ditto to himself. A man whose conscience is pure and clear speaks moderately, but the zealot spouts threats and hatred. There can be no clarity in a mind clouded by hate. Truly spiritual deeds cannot be performed by a fanatic, and are only at the command of one who, in silence and calm, has learned self-control and moderation.

Partisans, however, are









of expression. Castellio's answer to de Beze is profoundly, one might almost say mystically, sad. He can only feel sorrowful that men who profess devotion to the things of the spirit should surrender to such uncontrolled hatred. He knew well enough that the Calvinists were not trying to spread truth, but only to maintain the monopolist position of their own doctrines; and that they would not rest until they had swept him out of their path, as they had previously swept theoretical and political

















for Castellio is himself a living example of toleration in the struggle which has been forced on him. Instead of answering scorn with scorn, hatred with hatred, he writes: "I know of no country to which I could have fled if I had brought such charges against you as you have brought against me," going on to renew his attempt at such a kindly settlement of the dispute as, in his view, a dispute between intellectuals should always have. Once more he holds out the hand of peace and friendship, although his



opponents are sharpening the axe for his neck. “For the love of Christ I implore you to respect my liberty, and cease to overwhelm me with false accusations. Let me preserve my own faith uncoerced, as you preserve yours with my full approval. Do not continue to believe that he who differs from you must be wrong, and deserves to be burnt as a heretic. . . . When I see how so many other pious persons interpret Holy Writ in different ways from yourself, it makes me turn with more devotion to my

own faith in Christ. Unquestionably one of us two must be mistaken, but that need not prevent our loving one another. The Master will someday guide the strayed sheep back into the right path. The only thing either of us certainly knows (or ought to know) is the duty of Christian charity. Let us practise this, and by practising it close our adversaries' mouths. You believe your opinions to be right. Others believe the same of their opinions. Well, let the wisest among us show themselves the most brotherly. Let us not







other living person? The pious Genevese pastor rejected as “monstrous” this appeal to Christian peace. All he did was to start a new devil’s tattoo against Castellio, reinforced by the poison gases of contempt and incitation. Another lie was launched, in the hope of exposing Castellio to suspicion or at least to ridicule. Perhaps this was the most perfidious of all Calvin’s onslaughts. Although attendance at dramatic performances was regarded as a sin in Geneva, in the Genevese







customary house-to-house visitations in Geneva, two burghers were found conning a book which lacked Calvin's *imprimatur*. There was no author's name on the title-page or colophon, nor any place of publication mentioned. But all the more for that did the opusculc, *Conseil a la France desolee*, smell of heresy. The two readers were promptly brought before the Consistory. Dreading thumbscrew and rack, they hastened to acknowledge that one of Castellio's nephews had

lent them this *Conseil*. Impetuously the hunters followed up the fresh trail, hoping, at last, to bring their quarry to bay.

In very truth the book, “evil, because crammed with errors,” was a new work by Castellio. He had lapsed into his old “error.” Incurable, it seemed, was his Erasmian desire for a peaceful settlement of the conflict that raged within the Church. He could not remain silent when, in his beloved France, religious persecution was beginning to reap a bloody harvest, and when the Protestants,



renewed was the bloodthirsty attempt of narrow-minded fanatics to impose constraints upon conscience. However, as Castellio goes on to show, it is not only immoral and illegal to try and constrain any one to avow acceptance of a belief to which he is opposed; but it is also foolish, nonsensical. Such a pressgang to gather in recruits for the support of a philosophy or a creed can only secure hypocrites. The thumbscrew, the rack, or any other such constraint, achieves no more than a nominal increase in the













authorities. So effective was Calvin's organization, that in August, 1563, at the General Synod of the Reformed Churches, a resolution was passed as follows: "The Church is hereby informed of the appearance of a book entitled *Conseil a la France desolee* penned by Castellio. This is an extremely dangerous work, and the faithful are warned to be on their guard against it."

Once more the zealots succeeded in suppressing a "dangerous" work by Castellio before it had been





Beze, in his fury, mixed his opprobrious epithets so indiscriminately that many of them cancelled one another out. Still, what clearly emerged from this volcanic tumult was the determination to gag Castellio once for all, if possible by taking his life.

The fanatics had plainly disclosed their intention to have Castellio put on trial for heresy; the denunciation stepped shamelessly into the open, without a fig leaf. A plain appeal had been made to the Basle synod to set the civil authorities

straightway to work. Castellio was to be arrested as a public enemy. Unfortunately, however, there was a trifling obstacle to prevent the immediate carrying out of this amiable intention. By the laws of Basle, a prosecution could not be opened without a written indictment having been laid before the authorities, and the mere existence of a disapproved book would not suffice. In these circumstances, the obviously proper course would be for Calvin and de Beze to bring the charge against Castellio. But



man entitled to assume the role of defender of orthodoxy, being a son of the notorious Karlstadt, whom Luther had expelled from the university of Wittenberg, as a dangerous fanatic; besides, being a pupil of the distinctly irreligious Paracelsus, it was absurd for him to pose as an upright pillar of the Protestant Church. Nevertheless Bodenstein's indictment reiterated the confused arguments of de Beze's book, wherein Castellio was simultaneously described as a Papist, an Anabaptist,





himself against the aforesaid accusations? In excess of zeal, Bodenstein had charged him with such contradictory offences that the absurdity of the indictment was manifest. Besides, everyone in Basle knew Castellio's life to be blameless. The upshot was that the accused was not, as Servetus had been, promptly arrested, loaded with chains, gaoled, and maltreated, but, as a professor in the university, summoned before the senate to answer the charges.

He declared (as was true)



tribunal of Basle, since they made no ado about attacking me before the whole world. ... I know my accusers to be influential, but God, likewise, is mighty, and He judges without distinction of persons. I am aware that I am an obscure individual, lowly placed and comparatively unknown; but God keeps watch over the lowly, and will demand atonement if their blood should be unjustly shed. I acknowledge the jurisdiction of the court, and declare that if I am guilty of any of the things





distinguished foreigner had not been a nobleman or merchant, but none other than the infamous and outlawed archheretic, David Joris, author of the *Wonder Boek* — a man who had mysteriously disappeared from Flanders in the days of the massacre of the Anabaptists. Greatly were the Baslers discountenanced to learn that they had paid such high honour, both during life and after death, to a man who had been an enemy of the true faith! To atone for the misuse the impostor had made of their

hospitality, the long-deceased offender was solemnly tried by the authorities. The body of the heretic was exhumed, the mass of corruption was hanged for a time on the public gallows, and then, in the market-place of Basle, was burned, together with a number of heretical writings. The gruesome spectacle was witnessed by thousands of spectators—among these being, perforce, Castellio, side by side with the other professors of the university. Imagine their feelings. David Joris,



during his exile in Basle, had been bound to Castellio by the ties of close friendship. They had joined hands in the attempt to rescue Servetus; and it seems probable that Joris was one among the group of anonymous authors of "Martinus Bellius's" *De haereticis*. This much may be regarded as certain, that Castellio had never believed the inmate of the chateau of Binningen to be the simple merchant that refugee had proclaimed himself, but must have known from the first the true identity of the alleged





Church, he aroused alarm by the advanced nature of his views. Above all, his last book, *Thirty Dialogues*, contained an interpretation of the Bible which was regarded as blasphemous by the whole Protestant world; for Bernardino Ochino, quoting the Mosaic Law, affirmed that polygamy (though he did not venture to recommend it) was theoretically admissible, and was sanctioned by the Bible.

This book, containing the aforesaid scandalous thesis, and voicing many other opinions regarded by

the orthodox as outrageous, was translated by Castellio from Italian into Latin. The heretical treatise was printed in its Latin dress, so that Castellio was unquestionably responsible for the diffusion of most “abominable” views. Proceedings had already been taken against Ochino; and it was natural that, under present conditions, the translator should be regarded as a confederate, and as no less blameworthy than the Italian author. Thus betwixt night and morning Calvin’s and de

Beze's vague assertions that Castellio was a focus of the most dangerous heresies, had been given substantial support by the disclosure of his intimacy with David Joris and Bernardino Ochino. It was not to be expected that Basle University would continue to extend a protective hand over such a man. Castellio's cause was lost before the trial began.

What a Protestant advocate of toleration might expect from the intolerance of his contemporaries, Castellio could have learned from







him, warning good Christians to close their doors against such a wretch, who must be treated as if he were a leper. The aged scholar left Switzerland as a beggar, struggling through the snow, sleeping in barns; moved northward across Germany by way of Nuremberg, where also the Protestant congregations had been cautioned against him, but where he was allowed to stay for a time; his last hope being to find in Poland kindly persons to give him and his children sustenance and shelter. But



compassion in an era of such universal inhumanity. Servetus's defender might suffer Servetus's fate. The intolerance of the sixteenth century had laid a strangler's hand on the throat of its most dangerous adversary, the apostle of toleration.

Happily, however, the zealots were denied the supreme triumph of seeing Sebastian Castellio perish in prison, in exile, or at the stake. Death rescued him from his ruthless adversaries. For a long time his physique had been undermined by overwork;

and his strength was not able to stand up against so many sorrows and so much excitement. Down to the last, fighting valiantly though vainly, Castellio went on with his occupations at the university and in his study. He was forced to take to his bed at last, having been seized with uncontrollable vomiting, until finally his overtaxed heart resigned its task. On December 29, 1563, Sebastian Castellio died at the age of forty-eight, being thus, “by God’s help, snatched from the claws of his enemies” — as

a sympathetic friend phrased it when all was over.

His death put an end to the campaign of calumny. Too late, his fellow citizens recognized how lukewarm they had been in the defence of the most worthy among the inhabitants of Basle. The scantiness of his estate showed how poverty-stricken had been this great scholar. There was not a fragment of silver-ware left in the house. His friends had to provide funeral expenses, pay his trifling debts, and take charge of his children.

As if in recompense for the shameful-ness of the accusation of heresy, Sebastian Castellio's interment was a moral triumph. Those who had timidly drawn away from him after the charge of heresy had been brought, were now eager to show how much they loved and honoured him. The funeral train was followed by all the members of the university, the coffin being borne to the cathedral on the shoulders of students, and interred there in the crypt. At their own cost, three hundred of his pupils



## Chapter 9: EXTREMES MEET

*Le temps est trouble, le  
temps se esclarsira  
Après la pluie l'on attend le  
beau temps  
Après noises et grans  
divers contens  
Paix adviendra et maleur  
cesser a!*

*Mais entre deux quel mal  
Von souffrera!*

—CHANSON DE  
MARGUERITE  
D'AUTRICHE.









they might admire so admirable a specimen of a theocratic regime. What rigid discipline and spartan endurance could achieve, was achieved to the full. Granted, dynamic variety was sacrificed to monotony, and joy to a mathematical correctness; but, in return, education was raised to a niche among the arts. Schools, universities, and welfare institutions, were beyond compare; the sciences were sedulously cultivated; and with the foundation of the Academy, Calvin not only brought into being the first

intellectual centre of Protestantism, but at the same time set up a counterpart to the Society of Jesus created by his sometime fellow student Loyola—logical discipline being contraposed to logical discipline, and a steeled will to a steeled will. Splendidly equipped with theological armaments, preachers and agitators were sent forth from Geneva to spread Calvinist doctrines. The Master had made up his mind long ago that his authority and his teaching should not be restricted to









displayed in a moderation of demeanour, in a lack of emphasis as regards dress and behaviour, and even in the sobriety of architecture. Bridling everywhere the impetuous demands of individualism, strengthening everywhere the grip of the authorities, Calvinism elaborated, wherever it held sway, the type of the good servant, of the man who modestly but persistently subordinates himself to the community—in a word, the type of the excellent official and the ideally perfect member of the middle class. There is

considerable truth in the assertion that no other factor has worked so powerfully as Calvinism to promote the unprotesting obedience essential for the success of industrialism; for Calvinism inculcated upon the young as a religious duty, the unquestioning acceptance of equalization and mechanization. It must never be forgotten that a State enhances its military strength by the resolute organization of its subjects. Those marvellously tough, tenacious, and frugal navigators and colonists







Europe, they decreed that enthusiasm was only to be tolerated as a form of piety drawing men nearer to God. Other manifestations of enthusiasm were ruthlessly condemned as opposed to their interpretation of the Mosaic Law. A queer world it would have been had they achieved their end. The European spirit, undergoing atrophy, would have contented itself with theological hairsplitting, instead of unfolding and transforming itself without cessation. For the world remains barren and











as we throw away the skin of a fruit. In the great plan which mankind fulfils, dictators are but temporary forces; and what aspires to hedge the rhythm of life within a field of reaction, achieves its aim only for a season, to lead, then, to a yet more energetic escape. Thus by a strange modification, Calvinism, with its fierce determination to hamper individual liberty, gave birth to the idea of political liberty. Holland, Cromwell's England, and the United States of America, the three

countries where modern liberalism was first conceived, gave ample scope to the liberal and democratic ideas of the State. One of the most important of latter-day documents, the Declaration of Independence of the United States, issued from the Puritan spirit; while that Declaration, in turn, exercised a decisive influence upon the shaping of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Strangest transformation scene of all when extremes met. The lands which were to be



did not hesitate to engage in philosophic discussions with the blasphemers. In Holland, again, men who could find rest nowhere else on earth, Descartes and Spinoza, wrote books that were to free mankind from the fetters of ecclesiasticism and tradition. Renan, little disposed to talk of miracles, declared it to be a miracle that rigid Protestants were furthering the rationalist Enlightenment. Yet they did so. Persons who in other lands were being persecuted for their faith



for a few decades silence may enfold it, as the earth his coffin. No one breathed the name of Castellio; his friends died or vanished; the few of his writings that had been published gradually became unobtainable, and no one ventured to print the others. It might have been supposed that his fight had been fought, his life lived, in vain. But history moves along strange routes. The apparently unqualified success of his opponent, promoted Castellio's resurrection. The victory of Calvinism in Holland was









translations, so that half a century after Castellio's death a collected edition appeared at Gouda (1612). Thereupon, the resurrected Castellio became a centre of controversy, and had for the first time a large circle of disciples. His influence was widespread, though almost impersonal and anonymous. Castellio's thoughts lived again in others' works and others' struggles. The Arminians' famous advocacy of liberal reforms in Protestantism was mainly supported by arguments derived from his writings. When an

Anabaptist was being tried for heresy at Chur, Gantner, a Grisonese preacher, took up the cudgels on behalf of the accused, and appeared in court with “Martinius Bellius’s” book in his hand. It is probable, indeed, although documentary evidence of the hypothesis is lacking, that Descartes and Spinoza were directly influenced by Castellio’s ideas, since Castellio’s works were now so widely read in Holland. However this may be, the cause of toleration was not espoused by intellectuals

and humanists alone. Gradually it became the cause of the whole population of the Low Countries, who were weary of theological disputations and fratricidal wars of religion. In the Peace of Utrecht, the idea of toleration became a weapon of statecraft, materializing vigorously out of the realm of abstraction to take up its abode on solid earth. The ardent appeal made by Castellio to the princes, demanding that they should show respect for one another's opinions,







## Appendix A: BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

No new editions of Sebastian Castellio's writings have recently been issued, except for a reprint of the French version of *Concerning Heretics* (Martinius Bellius, *De haereticisy* "Magdeburg," 1554). This French version was published at Rouen in the same year as the Latin original; and was reprinted at Geneva in 1913, edited by A. Olivet with a preface by Professor Choisy. See also *Concerning Heretics*,

an English version, with excerpts from other works of Sebastian Castellio and David Joris on Religious Liberty, by Roland H. Bainton, 1935, being volume XXII of the *Records of Civilization*, published by the Columbia University Press. An edition of the hitherto unpublished *De arte dubitandi* (1562) is being prepared by Dr. Elisabeth Feist from the Rotterdam manuscript for the Academia di Roma. The quotations in the present work are partly taken from the original editions of





## **Appendix B: SOME ITEMS OF SIXTEENTH CENTURY CHRONOLOGY**

1503 John Frith born at  
Westerham, Kent.

1505 Birth of John Knox.

1509 Calvin born at Noyon  
in Picardy, July 10.

1509 Etienne Dolet born at  
Orleans, August 3.

1509 or 1511 Miguel  
Servetus born at Tudela  
(Navarre) or at  
Villanueva (Arragon)—  
exact place and date  
uncertain.

1515 Castellio born at  
Saint-Martin-du-Fresne,

Dauphine.

1517 Luther's ninety-five theses against indulgences published at Wittenberg.

1519 Beze born at Vezelay, June 24.

1520 Excommunication of Luther.

1521 Diet of Worms.

1528 Capuchin order recognized by Pope.

1529 Louis de Berquin burned in Paris for heresy, April 22.

1531 Servetus's *De Trinitatis erroribus libri septem* published at Hagenau.

1531 Zwingli killed at the

battle of Kappel, October 11.

1532 John Frith arrested for heresy by order of Sir Thomas More.

1533 John Frith burned at Smithfield for heresy, July 4.

1534 Act of Supremacy, whereby Henry VIII was acknowledged head of English Church.

1534 Bernardino Ochino becomes a Capuchin, when 47 years old.

1535 Sir Thomas More executed on Tower Hill, July 6.

1536 Calvin's *Institutio religionis Christianae*,













February.

1546 Etienne Dolet  
burned in Paris as  
relapsed atheist. August  
3.

1547 Death of Henry VIII  
of England, accession of  
Edward VI, January 28.

1547-1553. Ochino in  
England.

1548 Giordano Bruno  
born at Nola.

1549 Bucer, at Cranmer's  
instigation, becomes  
professor of theology at  
Cambridge.

1551 Bucer dies at  
Cambridge, February 28.

1553 Death of Edward VI of  
England, accession of









1556 Cranmer burned at Oxford, March 21.

1556 Knox again in Geneva.

1556 Death of Loyola at Rome, July 31.

1558 Death of Mary Tudor, November 17, accession of Elizabeth Tudor.

1560 Melanchthon died, April 19.

1560 Knox's Confession of Faith adopted, and Roman Catholicism formally abolished by Scottish Parliament.

1562 Castellio's *De arte dubitandi* written, but not published.

1562 Castellio's *Conseil a la France desolee*.





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